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AN

INQUIRY

INTO

THE CONSISTENCY

OF

POPULAR

AMUSEMENTS

WITH A

PROFESSION OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY

T. CHARLTON HENRY, D. D.

"We have a great work on our hands; the Gospel promises to believe; the commands to obey; temptations to resist; passions to conquer. And this must be done, or we are undone." WALSINGHAM.

Charleston, S. C.

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District of South-Carolina.

BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the twentieth day of June, Anno Domini, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-five, and in the forty-ninth year of the Independence of the United States of America, William Riley, of the said District, deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor, in the words following, to wit:—

"An Inquiry into the consistency of Popular Amusements with a profession of Christianity, by T. Charlton Henry, D. D. 'We have a great work on our hands; the Gospel promises to believe; the commands to obey; temptations to resist; passions to conquer. And this must be done, or we are undone.'—*Walsingham.*"

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JAMES JERVEY,
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TO

THE MEMBERS

OF THE

Second Presbyterian Church

IN

THE CITY OF CHARLESTON,

THE

FOLLOWING PAGES

ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY THEIR

AFFECTIONATE FRIEND AND SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following pages were written at the instigation of several of the Author's friends; and were intended rather to present his own views to those to whom they are inscribed, than to the community at large.— It was believed injudicious to do this in the ordinary course of professional duty. To occupy the attention of an audience with this single subject by a series of discourses, has not appeared expedient. The same end might be effected with less expenditure of time to the inquirer: while the arguments, which are advanced, might be more carefully examined.

If the writer could have laid his hand on any work which fully embraced the subject, he would have had no temptation to have undertaken it himself. It was not his desire to appear before the public in a question on which many may be sensitive; and in which no man can hope to gain much favour from the world, by assuming the negative. He has, therefore, acted

entirely from a conviction of duty. To the frequent inquiries of others, in relation to this subject, he has not always had time to furnish a satisfactory answer. And he would gladly have seen his own work superceded by, one written under circumstances of more leisure and attention. The want of this is believed to be a *desideratum* to the religious public. It is his intention, at a future day, to undertake it; and it is for this reason only, that the copy-right has been secured.

If an apology be necessary for the many defects which appear in the following pages, it will be found in the almost uninterrupted avocations of a laborious profession. They were written in brief intervals of time, irregularly occurring between other concerns: and would not have seen the light in their present state had it been possible, then, to digest and modify the materials which compose them. As it is, they appear with the best intentions of the author; whose end will be answered if the hints which they furnish lead to a more serious and extensive consideration of the subject on the part of the reader.

Many of the arguments which have been used, if not most of them, may have been employed in detached pieces, published in different religious periodicals.—The writer has seen very few of them. To the well

known work of Dr. Witherspoon on the Stage, he is indebted for several. Almost every volume which he has had an opportunity of consulting is named in the margin.

Although the following remarks have, in two chapters, been applied particularly to two amusements, they will be found applicable to any others of the same tendency. It was, therefore, thought unnecessary to particularize further. It will likewise be observed, that much which might be affirmed in regard to one of these amusements, applied with equal force to the other. For this reason, such general arguments are referred to the fourth chapter.

What has been said, is directed solely to the attention of the professor of religion. With the views of others the writer has nothing to do. He disclaims all intention of controversy. If the remarks are supported by the precepts of the Gospel, or established by fact, they deserve serious consideration: if not, they will possess very little weight.

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTION—DIFFERENCE OF VIEWS ON THE QUESTION.

THE line of distinction which should exist between the professor of religion and the worldling, has by no means been settled by public sentiment. It is indeed, admitted, on all sides, that a more exemplary demeanour is expected from the professing Christian, than from the declared sensualist; or from him who is called, by way of discrimination, the moral member of society. But this ad-

mission comprehends much that is undefined; and leaves much of a practical nature very questionable in its character. The broad precepts of the Bible which disclose our duty in so many words, are not easily rendered matters of dispute by the believer in Divine revelation.—But a variety of particulars which relate to the daily avocations of life, and which may be clearly taught, without being directly named, in the Scriptures, occupy the attention of the Christian casuist, and divide the opinions of a religious community.

This dissonance is not owing to any defect in the word of God: But to two causes wholly remote from it. The first consists in those vague views which are derived from the world in our ordinary intercourse with it: an intercourse which is unavoidable; and which, if it were not so, is not only expedient but necessary. The result of this is a mixed tone of sentiment made up of scriptural

and worldly notions, and clashing with the doctrines of evangelical truth; or, what may be equally mischievous to the interests of piety, a decision that many of the minutiæ of practice are matters of choice, distinct from the positive rules of duty, and to be adopted or rejected without incurring important consequences. This result is insensibly produced: so true is it, that habits of thought, and modes of belief, imperceptibly gain upon us, and fix a standard of action before we are aware of having considered the subject. We are creatures of imitation. And it is, therefore, not a matter of surprise, that we detect ourselves in adopting the views of others, in concerns which seem to require but little thought, as readily as in following an example where the issue is believed to be negative or trifling. This is especially the case where there is a reluctance to think for ourselves, or, where the conduct of the exemplar comports with our natural

desires. It is here, then, more than on points of magnitude, that the professor of religion is exposed in his intercourse with the world. In the latter, he is on his guard: in the former, he imbibes a moral poison without being conscious of what he is doing. It is this which constitutes the peril of the pious man, and which gives a force and a latitude to the injunctions of the New Testament, very different from the lax construction so commonly assigned them.

The second cause of the dissonance to which we have adverted, is the practice of determining duty by principles of Natural Religion. However singular this position may appear, it is very far from being unfounded. Thousands read the Bible, who never enter into the spirit of its meaning: who see in it nothing that relates to themselves, excepting a set of disconnected directions, promises and warnings: and who form no idea of a digested system, or a spiritual econ-

omy. Thousands, who profess to ponder over its sacred pages, find cases of conscience in their frequent experience, which appear undetermined by this holy criterion: Such cases are resolved by their own ideas of what should be, without being submitted to the question of consistency with the spirituality of the Gospel.

Others believe that the line of duty is distinctly marked; and that it is visible in every thing which can have a bearing on our present or eternal welfare. Part of this class are reluctant to carry their ideas into practice from a number of considerations: Another part are persuaded that no consideration should remain in the way of an implicit obedience to the plain prescriptions of duty: and they accordingly stand aside from the rest, in many of the details of life, as well as in their maxims of Christian morality. This distinction is often un-

happy in its tendency: It has given rise to contentions and jealousies, to illiberality and misconstruction; and by excluding a temper of candour, has prevented a fair examination of the subject of dispute.

The effect of all this, has been to establish two distinct systems, which have received the names of Rigid and Liberal: and there has been, at least, a tacit understanding between their adherents, that their views are widely different. Every one who becomes a member of a Church, is understood to have a choice before him, of these opposite systems; in which he is fully at liberty to indulge: As if more than a single standard of right could be formed from the Bible, consistent with it, or acceptable to God; or as if his Word did not present a plain and unequivocal standard of itself, from which there is no safe departure, and by which we shall be judged at his own tribunal.

The points of difference to which we have referred in the foregoing remarks, are not only numerous in themselves, but they are changeable in their nature, and dependent on the fluctuations of the manners and customs of the age. It is far from the intention of the writer, to enter into a discussion of these particulars: This is a task on which he has neither time nor disposition to enter.—There is, however, one of them, to which his attention has been incidentally directed, and to which it is proposed to direct the serious attention of the reader: the question *on the consistency of the amusements of fashionable life with a Christian profession.*

This question does not embrace all those engagements which are ordinarily called recreations. Some of these are admitted on both sides to be unobjectionable, under certain restrictions.—Among such, are included, those exercises which do not engross too much

time, produce no unhappy effect on feelings of devotion, do not lead to indiscriminate association, and cause no mischievous influence by their example.—Others are condemned, on the principle of their immorality, with an equally unanimous suffrage. At the head of this list, Masquerades and Gambling are placed by common agreement. Neither of these, therefore, has been the subject of dispute.

There is another class of pleasures, which divide the consent of professors of religion. They are denominated, by their advocates, "innocent amusements;" with a view not only to distinguish them from other recreations, but to decide their propriety at once by a name. Among these, there are two in particular, which, as they are most in vogue in the gayer circles of society, comprehend the principal points of discussion in the present day: these are *the Theatre* and *the Ball-room.*

Even in Churches of the same Sect, the question in relation to these "innocent amusements," is still agitated.—And the side which is assumed, gives to its advocate a character of laxness or rigidness, liberality or narrowness.—Few churches in the Presbyterian or Episcopal connexions, exercise discipline on the subject, whatever may be the views of their more exemplary members, or whatever articles of faith or government may have been adopted in them. An indecision, which is a necessary effect of the variation of opinion among those who are concerned on the subject. If the practice be wrong in itself, this indecision is much to be lamented; since its tendency is positive on the side of evil. We have heard the inquiry from many, uttered with all the confidence of acquired victory,—if these things be inconsistent, why are they not matters of Ecclesiastical discipline? why are they not expressly prohibited by the canons or

rules of the Church? The only answer which could possibly be given, will be found in a statement already made—that even professors of religion differ among themselves; a fact, which, however well established, by no means determines the question for those who are bound to examine for themselves; a fact, too, which owes its existence to causes of a very suspicious nature.

Among the religious advocates of fashionable pleasures, very few have taken much pains to investigate their tendency, and still fewer think it worth while, to render a serious reply to objections which may be started against them. "I see no great harm in these things," is a mode of expression familiar to the lips of many, who intend to settle their nature by it, in ranking them among the peccadillos of life; as too insignificant for grave consideration, and too venial to be brought to the bar of conscience.

Others insist that contending for these "questions of smaller moment" would be productive of more mischief to the harmony of society, than would be proportioned to the slight benefit which might be achieved. This view is taken on the presumption that the extent of the evil to which such questions refer, is already determined, and that its venial character is freely conceded. Even on this presumption, which is admitted only for the moment, the Christian morality of this opinion is very doubtful. It savours very little of that Heavenly wisdom which makes *purity* its *first* choice, and *harmony* only its *second.* It is the many *little* things of life, which, in their neglect or observance, tend to develope and confirm the Christian character: We are admonished of the greater duties continually. But the smaller ones require our constant vigilance and care. It is these which tend to produce a

tenderness of conscience, while they discipline the feelings, disposition, and temper. They exhibit the sincerity of our love to God, far more than the discharge of those cardinal obligations which less frequently occur, and are less easily omitted. They do more: by their frequent occurrence, they become the most effective test of the strength of religious principle: and that especially, while the temptation to neglect them is founded, as it is, on their supposed insignificance. The first efforts of the adversary of souls are always directed to this point; and his success is invariably followed by some degree of dereliction of principle. Nor is this all. Many of the little things of life, so called, prove, on examination, to be essential in themselves and important in their effects.—How far, then, they should be relinquished for the sake of peace, may no be hastily decided with safety.

Others propose this "liberality" in our views and practice, under the impression that by sacrificing a little much may be gained. "We should appear too singular,"—"the world would think us fanatical,"—"we should be excluded from the circle of our acquaintance,"—is a phraseology to which many of us have been accustomed whenever the expediency of these "innocent amusements" has been agitated. The ostensible design of such remarks is found in a plausible policy: This departure from the customs of the world, is supposed to diminish our influence in it, and accordingly to circumscribe our opportunities of doing good. "Let us *win* others to religion," it is commonly said: "let us not disgust them by too great an appearance of austerity." Specious as this plea may appear, it is utterly false: or if it be adopted under mistaken notions, it cannot be productive

of any possible advantage. Is this "liberality"—for we use this term in the precise sense with which it is commonly adopted—is this "liberality" consistent with the Saviour's plan of recommending his holy religion to our notice? Did the Apostles abate any thing of the moral law in their invitations and injunctions to obey the Gospel? The very reverse of all this was the system pursued, both by the Redeemer and the early heralds of salvation. They described the natural state of man: they exhibited his lost condition: they pointed out the means of recovery: But in doing so they never relaxed one tittle of the divine commands, or softened a single shade of the spirituality of divine truth.

In all our hopes of doing good to others, it must be admitted that we are entirely dependent on the blessing of the Holy Spirit. But is this blessing likely to be given to a system foreign to

the one devised by himself? Is the wisdom of man likely to effect more than that of God? Most particularly when the whole instrumentality of that wisdom consists in an acknowledged compromise between the maxims of the Gospel and those of the world? It is an "image of iron and clay" which these benevolent philanthropists have set up: It will totter to pieces at the first shock it receives. But let us suppose that success followed these efforts. Are these proselytes to a qualified Christianity likely to become spiritual followers of Jesus Christ? Will they not insist on the terms on which they embraced their religion? Will it not be more difficult to indoctrinate them in the "*first principles of the oracles of God?*" And is a hypocritical profession——even although it be made in ignorance—a gain to either the world or the cause of piety?

After all, however, the plea of policy, given in favour of fashionable amusements, is more specious than true.—There are few cases in which we should not suspect the sincerity of the offerer. It is more than likely that his entire design is a covert apology for a course in which his heart is engaged; and that the hope of doing good to others by it, is a mere pretext for indulgence.—A sincere desire to extend the Redeemer's kingdom, is necessarily and intimately connected with a filial and unqualified obedience to its laws: But the defenders of this liberality, on the contrary, may be for the most part, ranked among that class of people whom a popular writer of the present day* has denominated "the Borderers:" A party who occupy the neutral territory which was supposed to lie between Religion and the World; and who claim the privilege of

* Hannah More.

passing from the one to the other at pleasure, while they assume a right to all the advantages of both.

There is still another class, distinct from all these; who profess a willingness to follow the dictates of known duty, to their utmost extent. Whose errors, we would in charity hope, arise rather from ignorance of the true character of the Divine requirements, than from an habitual sophistry with themselves. They discover no evil in either of these "innocent amusements," while they are pursued in moderation. The sinfulness or inexpediency consists, according to them, in the excess of this pursuit: in turning pleasure into business, by an unremitting exertion to obtain it. They apply to this, the caution which was intended for a very different subject—"we are in danger of being undone by lawful things."

To persons of this last description, the following chapters are affectionately

addressed. The writer desires to leave the entire question to the candour of the conscientious professor of religion. He will acknowledge the justness of no argument, which is not directly or indirectly drawn from the principles of Evangelical religion. He has no wish to be at issue on this subject with those who have made no profession of faith, and do not render the word of God their standard of moral obligation.

CHAP. II.

THE STAGE

Has been warmly defended by argument and ridicule—Its early history not in its favour—Mischievous to both the manners and morals of the Greeks—Jealously regarded by the wiser Romans—Condemned by the Primitive Christians—The modern Stage indefensible—Furnishes no moral instruction, but, on the contrary, designed for mere amusement—Injures the cause of religion—The theory of a pure and instructive Stage chimerical—The inexpediency of supporting the Theatre.

THE Stage has had its many encomiasts and advocates, who have spared no pains to recommend or defend it: grave and elaborate argument has been employed in its service: and where this has failed, the reasoning which exposed its fallacy, has been tried and condemned at the bar of ridicule. This brief me-

thod of settling a question of importance, if it has not convinced the serious part of society, has certainly given the air of triumph, and the complacent feelings of victory to the partizans of the drama. It is certainly "in keeping:" and satisfies one side of the argument, however unfair it may appear to the other. An effect which even reasoning may not always be able to produce. It does more: It presents an invulnerable front, and is therefore seldom attacked in return.

The case assumes a different aspect when it is submitted to the criterion of strict morality. And its appearance is still more altered when a judgment is to be found in the principles of evangelical religion. The truth of this remark may be ascertained on an examination of the pleas in favour of the stage.

The Theatre is said to have been productive of moral good to society: its

tendency is declared to be beneficial, upon the whole, in the present age.— It is said to present a fair exhibition of human nature: and to 'combine recreation and improvement happily together.' This is the least which is assumed in favour of theatrical amusements. How far it is just may, in some measure, be seen in the ensuing remarks.

The Stage derives its origin from the festivities in honour of Bacchus and Venus;* names which give very little credit to the disciples of the Buskin or the Mask. To these deities Theatres were usually dedicated.† And it may be safely asserted that while they owe their birth to the extravagancies of intoxication,‡ and to the tumultuous pleasures of a semi-barbarous age, they tended to no subsequent advantage, aside from their influence on literature.

* Polydor Virg. lib. iii. cap. 13.
† Lactant. lib. vi.
‡ Athen. lib. ii. cap. 3.

The Greek Drama, as is known to every scholar, comprised, at first, only the Bacchanalian hymns and chorus. Thespis, to relieve the monotony of this entertainment, introduced a single actor, whose province it was to explain the subject of the hymn; and, as occasion required, to represent some particular personage. Æschylus improved on this innovation, by the introduction of a second performer. After which the whole performance, assumed a regular dramatic form.

There was one marked peculiarity in the Grecian tragedies which certainly gave them a powerful influence over the minds of the people, and arose from the fact that their religion was in itself highly of a theatrical character: it consisted in the practice of founding the plot on the supposed actions and will of the Gods. Superstition had prepared them for a powerful display of the *horrific*, and their credulity in

fables made them ready to receive the *wonderful.* We are told, for instance, that one of the tragedies of Æschylus was near being fatal to several of the attendants, from the astonishing excitement it produced on the feelings.—Yet it is certain that no moral inference can be drawn from the works of this writer. He renders us familiar with the sufferings of the body, but he leaves them disconnected with the sentiments of the mind. It is true, that Sophocles sometimes mingles axioms of philosophy with the language of the heart: And that Euripides, frequently, (and it might be added, often incongruously,) puts maxims into the mouths of his personages. But, notwithstanding all this, no one who has fairly examined the subject, will affirm that the scale of morals in Greece, was either elevated or respected in consequence of these exhibitions. The Athenians were an enthusiastic people; and they were

ready to receive the most lively impressions from any thing which affected the imagination. But all such impressions were fitful and momentary; they were interchangeably ridiculous and terrible in the same hour. No permanent lesson was ever taught them: unless it was one of immorality, from the indelicacy, and even indecency of the stage.

The Greek comedy has still less pretensions to the respect of the moralist. The vulgar and unbecoming witticisms, the ribaldry, low buffoonery, and—not to mention the obscenities—the personalities introduced into this department of the drama, have justly rendered it a subject of severe animadversion. It is true that after Aristophanes, whose plays were founded wholly on the circumstances of the day, the comedies of Menander and Theophrastus, made some advancement in theatrical decency, and in details of the human heart. Still, however, the po-

pular taste called for much that was demoralizing in its tendency. If the personality of the first of these writers led to the death of the principal ornament of Paganism,* it is much more than questioned, whether the compositions of the two last, which were written a century afterwards, tended to any improvement in virtue, whatever literary charm they may have possessed. It is very certain, that the history of the Greek stage, is a history of licentiousness. The first design was lost.—The very deities were ridiculed. The populace abandoned their respect for devotion: And those salutary restraints which a creed in any religion will impose, so far as it enlightens the conscience, ceased to exist.

One effect of these amusements was an essential deterioration in the national character of the Greeks. Recreation

* Socrates.

became a business. And that which at first was a religious monody, was now the means of keeping in constant agitation every excitable passion and feeling of the heart. The evil gained ground. A habit of mind was formed unfavourable to more serious concerns, and consequently unfriendly to the best interests of the Republic. Demosthenes vehemently complained of the impracticability of withdrawing the attention of the citizens from their frivolous engagements, and fixing it on the imminent danger in which they were placed by the designs and movements of their enemy. The apprehension formerly entertained of danger to the State from a paramount influence in *one* man, yielded, at last, to the real mischief produced by an opposite extreme,—the want of a salutary influence in *any*. No one possessed sufficient power over the minds of the people to divert them from frivolity. Amusement, and nothing else

but amusement, was the prevailing mania of the day. To this, their former glory had been sacrificed. For this they paid the price of their independence: and with it, at last, they lost the very enjoyments which they had prized above the honour of defending and confirming their freedom.

This effect had not been unanticipated. Solon forewarned Thespis that the consequence of his plays would be a deterioration in morals. An impression that evil would arise from either writing or encouraging dramatic pieces was not unknown to the minds of many of the wisest of the Greeks. The Athenians prohibited their judges from composing a comedy. Under Lycurgus, the Spartans permitted neither Tragic nor Comic representations. Plato banished them from his scheme of a pure republic.—Socrates and Plutarch condemned the stage, as the school of vice, and the nursery of criminal passions.

In Rome, the Theatre was held in no greater estimation. When in her highest glory, her citizens deemed him degraded who became an actor. They considered the stage so likely to be a source of immorality as to require the superintendence of a Censor to restrain its threatening mischiefs. All this, however, effected no valuable purpose. It was found impossible to avert the evil, even by careful restrictions. Scenic representations were, therefore, permitted only occasionally, and every license was restricted to a short period. Such was the fact until the time of Pompey the Great, whose immense power enabled him to erect a permanent Theatre.

The opinions of the wiser Romans, in regard to the tendency of these exhibitions is not very flattering to them. Seneca tells us, that vice made insensible approaches by means of the Stage.*—

* The following passage may be added from the same author:—" Nihil est tam damnosum bonis mo-

Quintilian declares, that "the music of the Stage had effeminated, by its obscenities, what little manliness remained among them."

The views and practice of the Primitive Christians were equally decided. Stage actors were enumerated among those who were excluded from the ordinance of baptism.* They were required to renounce their profession previous to admission, and could not resume it, under penalty of excommunication. Tertullian† informs us, that even the Pagans considered all such degraded; and deservedly excluded from all dignities and honours.‡ This aversion on the part of the Christians was noticed by Minutius Felix, who ridi-

ribus, quam in aliquo Spectaculo desidere. Tunc enim per voluptatem facilius vitia surrepunt.

* Constit. Apost. lib. 8. cap. 32.

† De Spect. cap. 22.

‡ A similar view may be found in Augustin. De Civ. Dei. lib. 2. cap. 14.

culed them on account of their abstaining from the Theatre.

It is humbly hoped, that these remarks, give something of a questionable shape to any defence of the morality of the Ancient Stage. Its effect on the literature of the day has been freely conceded: but its unhappy influence on the morals of society is perfectly demonstrable from its own history. To the writer, therefore, it appears perfectly plain, that so far from "engendering and promoting the best qualities of the heart," or from "giving a disgust for vicious propensities,"* the drama of both Greece and Rome was pernicious in its tendency and consequences.

How far the Theatre of the present day may be defended is obvious from the vague manner in which that defence is attempted: Unqualified as-

* Burnham.

sertion, without support or proof, comprises no small part of it. But a far more popular method is found in the practice of considering the whole question in the abstract. It is asked, 'what harm can there be in a mere show?' 'What evil in listening to a fable?'—'What mischief can artificial scenery produce?' These, and a variety of similar inquiries, which seem to arrive at the truth at once, place all discussion at defiance; or remove the burden of proof to points which have very little to do with the main subject. The same plan of reasoning would strip vice of its criminality, and render positive acts of virtue entirely negative in their character. It is not affirmed that there is any harm in a mere show, or that there is necessarily evil in listening to a fable; or that artificial scenery is productive of mischief. Yet it is affirmed, notwithstanding, that attendance on the Theatre is inconsistent

with the duties and principles of Christianity.

Instead of furnishing moral instruction, discouraging vice, or promoting sentiments of virtue, the plays of the present day, as well as those of the past, produce a very opposite end. Extremes of good or evil are designed to compose the principal parts of representation: but the exhibition of real worth, in the private details of life, or of a virtuous character complete as a whole, is hardly practicable: The displays of vice, are equally defective in their developement, as well as entirely overstrained. A fair analysis of the principles which actuate the *dramatis personæ* of the Modern Stage would substantiate this position. The magnanimity of its heroes would be found a sad misnomer, in contrast with the precepts of the Bible: Their generosity would be seen as the cloak of selfishness, or, at best, owing its existence to shallow motives: Ambition,

pride, or revenge would be found the secret spring of heroic achievements; and even these achievements themselves would not always pass the ordeal of severe scrutiny: while love—the most powerful passion in the human breast—is rendered the prime mover in these exhibitions, under forms of a most unsalutary influence.

On the other hand, it is said, that the subjects of plays, the actions and traits of character which they represent, if not founded on facts known to the writer, have their foundation in nature. This may, or may not be.—The argument is not worth contending for, since it proves nothing in the present question. Admitting that every thing is derived from biography or history, the effect on the large mass of spectators is still unhappy. Whatever horror the first sight of flagrant crime may inspire, a repetition of the spectacle diminishes the intenseness of

feeling, even on the supposition that this feeling is favourable to the cause of virtue: a familiarity with exhibitions of crime hardens the heart, blunts the sensibility, and insensibly breaks down the partition between moral right and wrong.

The characters which compose the great interest of a play, and the incidents on which the plot depends, are those which most gratify the corrupt dispositions of the heart. There is every thing to stimulate, and nothing to restrain the natural workings of depravity. The very hero whom we should hate for his enormities, lays a claim to our admiration by some other qualities of grandeur or generosity. There is something in our nature which is powerfully and sympathetically affected by fallen greatness: and the spectator finds it difficult to withhold his pity, if not his forgiveness, from the man whose crimes were perpetrated with a re-

mantic loftiness of thought, a daring enterprise and an inflexible fortitude.—And, whatever contempt he may feel for low arts of villainy, or whatever indignation may be excited against vulgar cunning, and the petty meanness of secret treachery, heroic virtues will be found the redeeming qualities of the heroic criminal. This is an effect which is resistless: because the whole appeal is to the feelings, and the judgment has no interest in the scene.*

* The views of one who was no enemy to the drama, are in this particular, not unlike those of the writer.

"Barthelemy says that the Athenians represented the misfortunes of kings upon their Theatres, in order to fortify the republican spirit of the people; but I cannot think, that to be continually representing the misery and distress of kings, was the most proper or likely method to destroy the love of regal power: great disasters are in themselves highly dramatic, they effect and take deep root in the imagination; this, then, cannot be the means of conquering such prejudices, or, indeed, those of any other kind."—*Mad. De Stael Holstein.*

The pleasure derived from theatrical amusements, will be in proportion to the susceptibility of the mind of the frequenter. Every thing in them is designed to be either imposing, or ridiculous. Nothing of a common or indifferent nature will meet the proposed end. It is not, therefore, a matter of surprise, that the minds of the youth of either sex, should be distorted, by a spirit of romance, or flippancy, adapted to disqualify them for the discharge of the daily and more sober avocations of life. If no powerful impression be made on the imagination, the pleasure of these amusements cannot be known: and there will be no disposition to attend upon them. If the reverse be the fact, there will be an acquired taste for the romantic or ludicrous, which will render insipid all more important and sober pursuits.*

* It is the remark of an elegant writer, that, "a disgust for what is sound, is the necessary effect of theatrical fable and enchantment."—*Le Pluche.*

The effect produced upon the passions or feelings, by scenic representations, has no connexion whatever with any moral influence upon the heart.—The tear which the deep scenes of tragedy excite, or the levity which is produced by comedy, are of the same character with those which may be elicited by the power of music.—There is nothing permanent: the reflection is directed to nothing useful or improving. Nor could it be otherwise. If there were any moral design in the play, it is very far from being its prominent feature. No trace, therefore, is left in the memory, excepting that of the developement of the plot, the passions of the hero, or the point of witticism.

But it is utterly denied that any moral design is even a secondary object in the play. Amusement, dissipation of thought, and forgetfulness of the common cares of life, comprise all

which the writer or performer aims to accomplish. If he does not depart from the rigid rules of morality,—a supposition admissible only for the moment,—it is not his effort to reduce them to practice. The Christian acknowledges no other standard than that of the Word of God: But would any one look for a strict adherence to this in a theatrical performance? is not a relaxation even from Gospel precepts necessary here? The melancholy truth is, that not only are the sanctions of the Divine law kept out of the question, but the principles of Natural Religion are inculcated by both maxim and example. If, on the one hand, civil regulations prevent the introduction of sentiments subversive of the order of society, on the other, the rules of Honour, opposed as they are to those of the Bible, are always presented. No sacred sanction is ever brought to notice. No just idea of the character of Deity is ever giv-

en. In this respect the modern drama sinks even below the most ancient plays: In the latter, it was perfectly practicable to discover the religious notions of the people: But if an advocate of the stage, in the present day, attempted, from any of its exhibitions, to ascertain the religious views of our country, he would find himself engaged in a fruitless task. Whatever conclusion he might draw, Christianity would be the last religion of which the occasion would remind him. But it is impossible that such an inquiry should end in mere negatives. If the impressions which are made on the minds of the great mass who crowd the Theatre, be not derived directly or indirectly from the truths of Christianity, they are taken from some other scheme. Both catastrophe and sentiment are seen and heard with an unavoidable reference to the great disposer of events, and the great teacher of duty; and we may,

without fear of contradiction, affirm that all theatrical notions of either are grounded in natural religion; or, to use another term, a religion quite foreign to that of Divine Revelation.

But we may proceed a step further; The Christian religion is rendered a loser by direct means. The personations of bigotry, fanaticism, and hypocrisy, have been the disguised tool of practical infidelity. Nor have instances been wanting in which the sacred office of the Ministry was introduced on "the boards," and its sanctity, under the caricature of hypocritical enthusiasm, rendered the subject of profane and scurrilous mimickry. The ostensible plea for all this, it is well known, is, that it is intended to expose folly and wickedness under the mask of religion. But, it may be asked, does this exposure reach the object it is intended to reform? And does it inculcate more respect for the teachers

or professors of Christianity? Does it not subject truth and sincerity to suspicion? Or is the exposure of vice to ridicule more likely to create an antipathy to evil than the inculcation of lessons of virtue? Is there a principle in our nature which readily lays hold of instruction by such means? These inquiries, it is believed, deserve the most serious consideration.

Nor is this all. Have the frequenters of the Theatre, never seen one of the most sacred of Christian employments brought to view in solemn mockery?—the irreligious member of society bending the knee, and with mimic awfulness appealing to the mercy-seat of the King Eternal? These things have been, and still are. If the frown of the more serious part of the community has rendered them comparatively infrequent, it is by no means a proof of reformation in the promoters of theatrical amusement. The improvement was never suggested by them.

A critical inquiry into the moral tendency of English plays, to say nothing of those of other countries, might indeed be a work of labour, but it would furnish alarming evidence of the correctness of the foregoing remarks.—It would be difficult to find an exception in those written in the age of Queen Elizabeth. In respect to those of a later day, the following remarks from the pen of a judicious writer, furnish a sufficient comment:—

"The licentious Court of Charles II. among its many disorders, engendered a pest, the virulence of which subsists to this day. The English Comedy, copying the manners of the Court, became abominably licentious; and continues so with very little softening. It is there an established rule, to deck out the chief characters with every vice in fashion, however gross. But, as such characters viewed in a true light, would be disgustful, care is

taken to disguise their deformity under the embellishments of wit, sprightliness, and good humour, which in mixed company, makes a capital figure.—It requires not much thought to discover the poisonous influence of such plays. A young man of figure, emancipated at last from the severity and restraint of a college education, repairs to the capital disposed to every sort of excess. The Play-house becomes his favourite amusement; and he is enchanted with the gaiety and splendour of the chief personages. The disgust which vice gives him at first, soon wears off, to make way for new notions, more liberal in his opinion; by which a sovereign contempt of religion, &c. are converted from being infamous vices to be fashionable virtues. The infection spreads gradually through all ranks, and becomes universal. How gladly would I listen to any one who should undertake to prove, that what I have

been describing is chimerical! But the dissoluteness of our young men of birth will not suffer me to doubt of its reality. Sir Harry Wildair has completed many a rake; and in the Suspicious Husband, Ranger, the humble imitator of Sir Harry, has had no slight influence in spreading that character. How odious ought writers to be, who thus employ the talents they have from their Maker most traitorously against himself, by endeavouring to corrupt and disfigure his creatures! If the comedies of Congreve did not rack him with remorse in his last moments, he must have been lost to all sense of virtue. Nor will it afford any excuse to such writers, that their comedies are entertaining; unless it could be maintained, that wit and sprightliness are better suited to a vicious than a virtuous character."* Archbishop Tillotson has given

* Lord Kaims' Elements of Criticism. Vol. 1.—This work, in which the writer characterizes the En-

it as his opinion that "plays might be so framed, and they might be governed by such rules, as not only to be innocently diverting, but instructive and useful, to put some follies and vices out of countenance, which could not perhaps, be so decently reproved, nor so effectually exposed or corrected in any other way." But he adds: "as the stage now is they are intolerable, and not fit to be permitted in a *civilized*, much less in a *Christian* nation. They do most notoriously minister to both infidelity and vice. By the profaneness of them they are apt to instil bad principles into the minds of men; and to lessen the awe and reverence which all men ought to have for God and religion.—And, therefore, I do not see how any person pretending to so-

glish Comedy, as continuing "abominably licentious" "with very little softening," was first published in 1762.

briety and virtue, and especially to the pure and holy religion of our blessed Saviour, can, without great guilt and open contradiction to his profession, be present."

Whatever progress in moral taste the nineteenth century may have made, one of its most useful writers has presented the following sketch of the English stage: "Did we wish to root up every religious and moral principle from the heart, to tempt our daughters to barter away the brightest jewel of their sex; to inflame the passions of our sons, and abandon them to their lawless empire; did we wish our children to become familiar with crime, to blunt and deaden those delicate sensibilities which shrink at the touch of vice; did we wish to harden and inure them to scenes of blasphemy, cruelty, revenge, and prostitution, we would invite them to the sight of the most popular plays which

are now performed on our stage."*— The extraordinary "run" which a popular farce has had during the past year throughout the United States, inimical as it is to all sobriety and rational thought; as well as the general character of the plays which have drawn

* Thirlwall's Solemn Protest, London, 1803, p. 6, 7. In a postscript to the second edition of this work, Mr. Thirlwall remarks, he "had hoped that the book would have induced the manager to abstain at least from an appearance of indecency in his *Bill of entertainment*:" and the influence of the author of "*Diatesseron*" was not small among the serious part of society. But contempt and ungenerous sarcasm proved the fallacy of these hopes. "How great," he says, "was our surprize to observe that the title of one part (of the bill of entertainment,) and that printed in the largest capitals, and no doubt designed for the greatest attraction of the whole exhibition is the "*Great Devil*," and the principal character of the *dramatis personæ* is distinguished by the title of *Satana!*" To this enjoyment, each of the magistrates who had the power to controul that theatre, was presented with a *silver ticket* of admission, and a letter of invitation to honour with his presence "performances combining in their nature *rational* amusement with *regularity* and *decorum*."

"crowded houses," furnishes no very clear evidence of the good effects of the American stage.

A common answer to all this is found in the following remark, which is intended to aid its abettor in leaping over all objections of a religious nature, although it lands him in the midst of others: "We do not go to the theatre to be taught religion." The Peripatetic of the boards would indeed be a defective instructor. But it may be laid down as an axiom, that wherever sentiment is taught, its bearing must be in favour or against the doctrines of evangelical truth; there is not, and there cannot be, a neutral ground. If the latter consequence follow; or, if it be seen that the strict precepts of the Gospel are indirectly impugned, not only will the mind be less prepared for the solemnities of the Sanctuary, where a spiritual doctrine is expected—not only will a distaste

for such doctrines be acquired insensibly, yet invariably—not only will the contrast between the two occasions be unhappy in a heart thus declining in grace—but a result of a more fearful and permanent character brings up the rear of mischief; this is neither more nor less than a weakness of conscience: a want of that power of discrimination between right and wrong, which, while it is the principal safe-guard of the Christian, constitutes a great source of his enjoyment. If, as has been said, the influence of the stage is detrimental to the cheerful discharge of the more common and ordinary duties of life, it is certainly still more so to those of the temple of God.*

*La comédie nous donne une idée agreable des passions vicieuses. Le cœur y est amolli par les plaisirs; l'esprit y est tout occupè des objets exterieurs, et entierement enivrè des folies que l'on y voit repréſenter, et par consequent hors de l'etat de la vigilance Chrétienne, necessaire pour resister aux tentations.—*Pictet. Morale.*

The stage has another plea in its favour. Its evil, at least to a certain extent, is acknowledged by many, who are still partially its advocates, but who tell us that "it can do no harm to those whose principles are fixed." If there be any plausibility in the preceding observations, no principles founded in evangelical piety can come in contact with impressions derived from the stage, without suffering in a greater or less degree: the very pleasure derived from the occasion is a proof of this. But even if this statement were incorrect, and if inflexible principle could be found, able to withstand a pestiferous influence, there is another consideration which should bear a preponderating weight with it, to every reflecting mind: the force of example. It will be necessary hereafter to advert to this more fully. At present it may be worth while to inquire whether we are willing to engage in any act, which, while

it renders us in no small degree accountable for the effects of our own example, brings those effects with an overwhelming force upon thousands around us?

This is but a hasty sketch of the mischiefs of which we have to complain arising from Theatrical amusements. And there is one remark which gives them additional force: this tendency of the stage cannot be corrected: In the meanwhile there is no fairness in arguing from what it might be rendered to prove the expediency of supporting it as it is. The possibility of a pure and useful theatre is past all hope: it is an air-built castle; and it were well to occupy no other until this is removed from the fancy to "fixed locality." It is indeed true, that some men of excellent moral character have written for the stage; and perhaps some who were ranked among the religious of their day: They have done so

under the hope of improving this means of amusement; and have aimed to correct its present evil by a better model of the drama. The complete failure of some of these experiments is well known. In other instances their works have been forced upon the attention of the public for a season, and then were forgotten. Gregory Nazienzen and Buchanan laboured in vain for this purpose. It is very doubtful whether their plays were ever performed; and it is certain that they are not now. It is true that Addison had said, "the stage might be made a perpetual source of the most noble and useful entertainments, were it under proper regulations:" and this tacit confession of its present evil had been preceded, or was followed, by an effort to raise the standard of theatrical performances. Few who have paid much attention to the subject are unacquainted with the result. And even now, it is very uncertain whe-

ther either Addison's, Young's, Rowe's, or Thomson's dramatic pieces would pay the expenses of the Manager if they were performed. And the great reason is, that their chief design was to inculcate moral sentiment: that of the Theatre, it has already been said, is to furnish mere amusement.

The following quotation increases the improbability of success in any such attempt:—"It is so true, that plays are almost always a representation of vicious passions, that the most part of Christian virtues are incapable of appearing upon the Stage. Silence, patience, moderation, wisdom, repentance are no virtues, the representation of which can divert the spectators; and above all, we never hear humility spoken of, and the bearing of injuries. It would be strange to see a modest religious person represented. There must be something great and renowned according to men, or at least, something lively

and animated; and, therefore, those who have been desirous to introduce holy men and women upon the Stage, have been forced to make them appear proud, and to make them utter discourses more proper for the ancient Roman heroes, than for Saints and Martyrs. Their devotion also, upon the Stage, ought always to be a little extraordinary."*

Plays must be written to suit the taste of the age. They can never go before it in moral advancement; since their popularity depends entirely on their adaptation to the inclinations of the spectators. But that the mass of those who support the Stage, have no taste for evangelical truth, or in other words, do not profess to have an experimental acquaintance with religion, is admitted on all sides. Until, then,

* An essay from one of the volumes published by the Gentlemen of the Port-Royal, quoted by Dr. Witherspoon.

there is a change in this respect, there can be very little hope of rendering the Theatre a suitable place for the society of Christians. In the meanwhile, let it be remembered, that the fallacy of such a hope, and the reasons which prove the fallacy, are in themselves, an irresistable evidence to the candid mind on this part of the question.

What has been said has an exclusive reference to the Drama as it is. There are objections to the Theatre perfectly independent of the play itself, and which alone should operate against it in the judgment of the Christian.—Among these may be named the inexpediency of supporting a profession which has for its object the mere amusement of the worldling: which is to be occupied wholly in furnishing the means of wasting time, and banishing serious reflection: A profession which, from its very nature, excludes its follower from a respectable standing in society,

while it would present a sad contrast to any personation of virtue or worth, which the performer might attempt.*— Not only is it true, that a player is employed in a calling which is unchristian, as is obvious from its very tendency—but his engagements are such, as even the advocates of the drama consider disreputable. The following remark is from the pages of a writer avowedly of this character :—" The exorbitant rewards of players, opera singers, opera dancers, &c. are founded

* Le peu d'idée qu'on a de la vertu d'une Comedienne, ou d'un Comedien, détruit les beaux exemples qu'ils soutiennent.—*Pictet.*

When suspicion is attached to the piety of an incumbent in the sacred office, is it not sometimes urged as an excuse for neglecting the sanctuary, in which such a man officiates—even although it be mere suspicion—and even although his instructions are known to be Scriptural? But if the Theatre *were* a school of virtue, does the character of the players come up to the standard of virtue supposed to be taught? If not, why is not the same reasoning adopted here as in the former case?

upon these two principles: the variety and beauty of the talents, and the discredit of employing them in this manner. It seems absurd at first sight that we should despise their persons, and yet reward their talents with the most profuse liberality. While we do the one, however, we must of necessity do the other. Should the public opinion or prejudice ever alter with regard to such occupations, their pecuniary recompense would quickly diminish.—More people would apply to them, and the competition would quickly diminish the price of their labour. Such talents, though far from being common, are by no means so rare as is imagined.—Many people possess them in great perfection, who disdain to make this use of them; and many more are capable of acquiring them, if any thing could be made honourably by them."*

* Smith's Wealth of Nations, vol. I.

What then, is this less than a prostitution of faculties, which were never given for such a purpose? And is it under any circumstances, lawful to encourage it?

The habits and pursuits of the Player are powerful obstructions to the acquisition of piety in his own heart. He whose sole occupation is to furnish amusement and to dispel serious reflection, is not likely to reflect seriously himself. This argument would have little weight with many: the man of the world might smile at the overweening disinterestedness which it would seem to display: but to the reader, for whom these pages were intended, it ought to be of primary importance. The Christian cannot look with unconcern on a profession, the consequences of which are likely to be baneful to the eternal interests of those who have engaged in it. The hour will arrive, when that complaint will

be uttered by thousands, and tingle in the ears of many whom it justly accuses—"*no man cared for my soul!*" In this view of the subject, if no other individual were injured by the Theatre,—if there were no general evil to be apprehended to society at large,—the value and danger of the soul would furnish a plea to the conscientious, too powerful to be resisted, and too solemn to be trifled with.

Whatever tends to violate any of the Divine institutions, is obviously opposed to the law of God, and ought not, therefore, to be supported. But is the Theatre never open on the night previous to the Sabbath? And are there none of those who were engaged in attendance, or performance, necessarily obliged to encroach in some measure on the hours of the Sacred day? To say that we would not attend at an unseasonable period, is saying very little. There are many whose occu-

pations will not permit them to be present at any other time. The only remedy which can be devised, is to refuse encouragement altogether. We are in duty bound, to withhold all countenance from engagements which have an evil tendency, or with which evil is in any way connected.

That the Play-house is a rendezvous for persons of a notoriously and professionally vicious character is too well known to require even an assertion. That it is the resort of the dissolute of both sexes is equally a matter of notoriety. On this subject, the writer cannot forbear extracting the following paragraphs from a work of established reputation.

"It is well known, that we profess ourselves decided enemies to the Theatre; or, in other words, to that description of theatrical amusement, which at present prevails: plays in which virtue is laughed out of countenance, and

play-houses, to which the votaries of impurity find unrestrained admission.— To oppose ourselves to a Theatre, so constituted is surely no mark of illiberality. We cannot believe that any man who ever entered the lobby of Covent-Garden or Drury-Lane, between the play and the after-piece, will sincerely hold it to be a place to which a Christian may resort: and yet it is under the same roof, and in immediate connexion with the whole interior of the Theatre, and exhibits only a concentration of that impurity, which, during the rest of the evening, is diffused through every other part of the house, and brought immediately before the eyes of a large part of the company. On this subject we cannot forbear incidentally to notice, that, exclusively dedicated, as the lobby of the Theatre has always been to immoral purposes, its very existence betrays a disgraceful insensibility on the part of the proprie-

tors, both to the interests of morality and to public decorum. We are aware, it may be said, that they cannot be responsible for the abuse of an apartment, constructed merely for the convenience of the respectable part of the audience: and that, by this mode of reasoning, it becomes unlawful to build streets or private houses; but the answer plainly is, that the room is *not* built for the respectable part of the audience, because it is notorious, that they are never seen there; and that in the existing state of manners, the place can never be an accommodation for any but those whose objects it is sinful to consult."*

And yet, we are gravely told, that all this is a necessary evil. What an apology to present to the Christian!—Does it not speak volumes against the practice it is intended to defend?

* Christian Observer, edited by members of the Church of England. Vol. 12, pp. 228--9.

CHAP. III.

DANCING.

Its history not in its favour as an amusement—Ancient Dancing Sacred—The practice condemned by the Romans—By the Primitive Christians—The Dancing mentioned in Scripture described—Scripture passages on the subject explained—The practice not expedient—The supposed silence of the Bible on the subject, no argument—A reference to it in the Epistles.

It must be confessed that the amusement now under consideration presents, at first sight, a much fairer claim to the title of "innocent" than many others adopted by the fashionable world. There is an appearance of harmless gaiety, an expression of artless pleasure, in the exercise of the dance, which

seem to place it past the censure of any milder judge than bigotry itself. Its advocates have, therefore, felt the greater confidence in passing sentence against those whose religious scruples have led them to condemn it. On the other hand, it should be admitted that the vague manner in which such scruples have been expressed has not always been adapted to secure that respect to which opinions of conscience are more or less entitled: yet these opinions do not arise from the love of an unsocial austerity, or from opposition to a becoming cheerfulness of deportment. They are held by very many whose demeanour would never cast a gloom over the friendly circle, and who are as sensible as any to all the charities of life. But they are held after a candid inquiry into the subject; and a deliberate decision, taken from the nature of the divine precepts, as well as from the principles of Christian expediency.—

Opinions drawn from such a source will never give offence to the ingenuous temper.

Much that has been said in favour of dancing as an amusement, is reasoning of the same character with that of the advocates of the stage,—abstracted from consequences. It is unnecessary, in this place, to deny again the admission of this method of settling any question. But there are other arguments which come fairly within the compass of our inquiry. Among these is the following: "Whatever has obtained in consent and practice among all nations and in all ages, is very little apt to be wrong. And this is exactly the case with dancing."* If the premises contained in this paragraph were better established, the conclusion

* "Tomlinson considered." The writer whose work is favourably "considered" in a pamphlet of 70 pages, was a dancing master in the reign of Queen Anne.

which is supposed to be derived from them might be of some importance, so far as this subject is concerned. But is it true that whatever has thus obtained in consent and practice is necessarily right? Are there not numerous evils both in principle and practice which have thus far "obtained," and yet are in direct opposition to the precepts of God? Is not this the fact in relation to what are called the laws of honour? Is it not so in a variety of particulars in which the unrenewed heart is far from being governed by a holy standard of rectitude. It is a sadly defective argument which is intended to prove any practice to be consistent with the genius of Christianity, from its universal adoption among nations who were ignorant of the true religion.

The history of dancing proves nothing in favour of its moral tendency as an amusement. It seems to have taken its rise among the ancient He-

brew institutions, and to have constituted a part of their religious ceremonies. From them it was borrowed by the Pagans. That it was originally an expression of joy,* and therefore rendered a part of sacred rites among a people whose worship was in a great measure ceremo-

* The following remarks on this subject are from the pen of a late writer, who traces all religious customs to Nature.

"The rude child of nature, endued with nerves of exquisite sensibility, having obtained some desired object, received that inexplicable shock, which the Divinity hath decreed man shall not fully comprehend; immediately the subtle pleasure extended to every fibre of his frame, and the convulsive motion became a dance; as joy is communicable, his family were inspired, his neighbours caught the infection, and the manner of this first dance necessarily assumed some degree of method, to prevent collision. Such may have been the principal cause of dancing; another arises from certain combinations of sounds, which, vibrating strongly upon the air, communicates an impulse to the delicately sensible something residing in the nervous system; when the sounds are musical, the limbs are compelled to answer to them; and whether they are merely sufficient to produce a march, or measured steps, or powerful enough to excite violent action, they equally belong to dancing."

nial, appears highly probable: But that it degenerated into irreligious festivity admits of still less doubt.

Among the ancient Egyptians, both music and dancing were consecrated to their Gods.* The Greeks used both in their processions before the Deities.† And we are told that no ceremonial of religion, no expiation or atonement was considered complete without them.‡ The dancings of the youth at the altar of Apollo are well known. Plato classes dancing into three heads. The first, which was in use among the Spartans, was intended to train the males for martial discipline. This was a part of the education of children at five years of age, and was not long in use. The second was solely for amusement, and degenerated into voluptuousness and obscenity. The third was entirely re-

* Plato, De Legibus, Lib. iii.
† Strabo, Lib. x
‡ Lucian, *De Saltatione.*

ligious, and was considered indispensable at all the mysteries. The most ancient of this character was called the Bacchic, and was accompanied with the lyre and the voice. The Greeks were nationally devoted to amusement, and the practice was therefore nationally encouraged; and the more so, as some among them believed it conducive to a more complete practical knowledge of the military art. On these accounts they not only erected statues to the memory of several who had gained credit by their skill as dancers, but they even applied that name to some of their deities. What effect their unremitting dissipation had upon them as a people, or what aid this custom furnished them in repelling an enemy, is seen in the causes of their decline and downfal.

The intelligent part of the Roman community were of very different sentiments. Dancing was not admitted within the circle of accomplishments

in the Capital. It was not only considered conducive to an unbecoming levity, not only viewed as inconsistent with the dignity of character which it was desirable that all the citizens should sustain, but positive acts were passed against it; and in one instance an Emperor removed several Senators from office in consequence of their engaging in the amusement. Cicero himself has said, "hardly any sober man will dance, either privately or at a respectable entertainment, unless indeed he be deranged."*

The testimony of the primitive Christians is decidedly opposed to it. This is plain from several passages in Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustin: to say nothing of opinions passed in some of the early Councils.†.

* "Nemo ferè saltat sobrius, nisi fortè insanit, neque in solitudine, neque in convivio honesto."

† The following quotation from a learned author, who has done little more than name the subject, may

Before we proceed to the consideration of the defence and tendency of this amusement, so far as relates to modern times, it may be proper to examine the argument in favour of it taken from Scripture; unhappily not the only instance in which the letter of Holy Writ has been adduced against its spirit. Dancing is said to be "frequently mentioned in the sacred volume without a single censure from the great Lawgiver against it." The answer is obvious to the reader who is conversant with Jewish customs. For those who are not, the following paragraphs are added:

It has been already intimated that the custom owes its origin to the religious institutions of the ancient Hebrews. Dancing and music, usually, if

be relied on, although the writer of these remarks has not had the means of examining it. *Le Concile de Laodicée, Le Concile de Lerida, et le troisième Concile de Tolede ont dèfendu les danses.*

not always, accompanied each other.—It was thus Miriam glorified God, by both dancing and songs, on account of the deliverance from the Egyptians.* It was common at the festivals,† and in public triumphs.‡ The idolatrous Jews rendered it a part of the worship paid to the golden calf.§

The conduct of David, in a certain instance,‖ has been quoted in favour of "unbending from the forms of royal state to join in this cheerful exercise." This "unbending" was neither more nor less than performing a part in a religious ceremony. And the term "uncovering himself" refers merely to laying aside the ensignia of royalty; for it seems the monarch wore, besides his under clothing, not only the Ephod, but a robe of fine linen. The charge

* Exod. xv. 20.
† Judg. xxi. 19, 21.
‡ Judg. xi. 34.
§ Exod. xxxii. 19.
‖ 2 Saml. vi. 20, 23.

in relation to his company was an imputation against the Levites themselves. The whole accusation was the raving of a passionate and splenetic woman, as irreverent as it was groundless.*— David did no more than was afterwards done by the Emperor Augustus, in mingling with the festivities of the people. The only difference was, piety taught the former that in the solemnities of religion all men are on a level; the latter acted from motives of civil policy.

The passage of Solomon, "*a time to mourn and a time to dance,*"† is frequently quoted for the same purpose. But after what has been said it is plain that the meaning of this sentence is simply as follows: 'The dispensations of

* The term "shamelessly," which is considered as a proof of David's "conviviality," is not in the original. If any word be wanting in its place, the word "openly," used in the margin, is much more correct.

† Eccles. iii. 4.

God at some times call upon us to mourn, at others to express our gratitude by the religious rites instituted for that purpose.' A similar paraphrase would explain another text which has been equally perverted: "*We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented.*"* 'Ye have not exhibited the evidences of a religious gratitude in the midst of divine mercies, nor have ye mourned when called to do so by the afflictive providence of God.'

The foregoing remarks will be found explanatory of similar passages. It could not be expected that a ceremony expressive of joy and gladness would always continue unabused among a people who often prostituted their most sacred rites to idolatrous and profane purposes. A defection of this kind was accordingly observable at a very early pe-

* Math. xi. 17.

riod. The only two instances, however, in which dancing is expressly mentioned in the Bible, as a mere amusement, are very unfavorable to the cause of its defenders. Job makes it a characteristic of the prosperous wicked that "their children dance:" and adds, "*they take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ.—They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave.—Therefore they say unto God depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*"* The other instance is found in the history of the profligate Herodias.†

An attentive reader of the Bible would come to the following conclusions on the subject: That dancing among the Jews was never changed from a sacred use to mere worldly fes-

* Job. xxi. 11,—14.

† Math. xiv. 6, 8.

tivity, uncondemned; and that the two sexes never united in it.*

Some things which are said in favour of dancing are certainly not without foundation. That it is a salutary exercise, if taken moderately and in the open air, or in an uncrowded room, can be denied only by the blindest prejudice. But this would be a modification of the popular system not easily submitted to. How far it conduces to health as it is generally practised, in a crowded room, during late hours, and succeeded by a sudden transition to a cooler atmosphere, is a question not

* A pious old writer defines dancing thus: 1. "a comely motion of the body, stirred up by the inward and spiritual joy of the heart, to testify thankfulness for some great benefit or deliverance from God.—This kind of dancing is lawful and holy." 2. "A motion of the body seemly or unseemly stirred up by natural or carnal joy, to please and satisfy ourselves or others. This kind of dancing is unlawful, unless it be privately by the one sex only for moderate recreation." *Dictionary of Christianity, by Thomas Wilson*, 1681.

difficult to answer. That this amusement "is adapted to wear off bashfulness" is freely conceded; and it is sometimes not unlikely to wear still deeper, to the removal of that retiring feeling, which to the unsophisticated taste constitutes a principal charm of the female sex. That *mauvaise honte*, which in the eyes of some parents is as condemnable as a slight defect of principle, is not unfrequently succeeded by a degree of vanity or flippancy, which adds little to the attractions of a female. That a practical acquaintance with this art tends to produce a gracefulness of movement will not be wholly denied. But even this, is not entirely conceded. Graceful and natural may sometimes be terms of very opposite meaning.—Painters, who should be the best judges of attitude, deny that modern dancing produces natural figures. Other kinds of exercise by females, and the military evolutions by males, are said to

effect this end much more readily.—Yet after all, since the moral tendency of fashionable amusements is distinctly the subject of the present inquiry, it is hardly worth while to look into their effect in accomplishing the manners; or to agitate the question, whether personal gracefulness may not be attained without them. Neither of these questions furnishes a case of conscience to the mind of the Christian.

It has been very gravely said in defence, that "dancing is an expression of cheerfulness and contentment, a display of those happy feelings which constitute the offering of a grateful heart, so acceptable to our Creator."—Whether this sentiment partakes more of Paganism than of Christianity, it requires very little examination to decide. Religious joy is certainly not intended in the act; nor can it ever conduce to such a purpose. Now the return which is demanded at our hands

for the mercies we receive, is known to consist in a life of obedience and faith. Less than this is never required. But there is an additional claim on all this, derived from our temporal prosperity. Let two cases be supposed, in which it is intended to express gratitude for mercies received, and to evince a suitable temper of mind to the Divine Benefactor: In the one, the heart is humbled by a sense of undeserved goodness,—penitent under a consciousness of this ill desert: the mind easily and feelingly traces every favour to its source; while it draws a practical argument in favour of activity in the Redeemer's cause; of a more holy life; of a greater regard for the spiritual welfare of others; and of an increased liberality and exertion to promote the advancement of the Saviour's kingdom on earth. In the other case, the gladness of the heart is expressed by an eager grasp

at pleasure, which prosperity furnishes the opportunity of enjoying: the gratitude is evinced by a selfish hilarity; no new requirement is recognized, to do or give, more to those religious operations of the day, which are designed to extend the glory of God: nay, the very expediency of those operations, may be questioned in the midst of an unwillingness to examine them; or they may be forgotten in the selfishness of worldly enjoyment, and in that dearth of religious thought, which is more or less consequent upon the employments of a worldly temper.—Which of these two cases—we will not say best answers the great end of our being, or best illustrates a regard to our stewardship—but which of these two cases presents the more acceptable offering of gratitude to God?—That they are extremes, is very certain. But that the former comprises an exemplification of Christian duty, is

equally certain. A cheerful disposition is the legitimate fruit of a Gospel hope. Tempered with a pious frame of mind, it will never diminish the dignity of the Christian character. But the mere buoyant spirits of a "carnal mind," arising from the prosperity of temporal circumstances, have certainly no connexion with a sacrifice of thankfulness. Nor have the natural spirits of a gay and cheerful temper, any such necessary connexion. In the heart of piety, they may be equally the springs of happiness and temptation. They call for vigilance to prevent their perversion. They require all the care of their possessor, to direct them to a right end.* But they may as com-

* The Apostle James, seems to have had this in view in the following admonition, "*Is any among you afflicted? let him pray: Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*" (v. 13.) The man who finds his happiness in his religion, rather than his religion in his happiness, (as in the argument above adverted to,

pletely betray a forgetfulness of God, as they may evince a consciousness of his goodness and mercy.

"But," it has been asked, "if this amusement be inconsistent with the profession of Christianity, why is it not prohibited in so many words in the Sacred Scriptures?" It is no difficult matter to answer this cavil. If, as many have supposed, the Christians of the first century were, themselves, exposed to no temptations from this source; if they saw nothing of the evil; or if their habits and taste rendered them completely secure from it, there would be very little necessity for an admonition on the subject. To mention every custom which is inimical to religion,

will have very little inclination to censure the religious enthusiasm of him who in its general sense adopts the direction of the Apostle: and he who experimentally knows, that "the goodness of God leadeth to repentance," cannot easily trace its leadings to the scenes of worldly amusement.

by its own particular name, would be to swell the volume of Divine Revelation to an unwieldly size. To advert to those which would prevail in the future process of time, would not only be saying much unintelligible to early Christians, to whom the Epistles were written, but it would be to carry a spirit of prophecy to an unnecessary extent. The inspired writers have adopted a much more succinct method. They have described the relative duties of a pious life: they have pourtrayed its dispositions and temper: they have contrasted it with an opposite course: they have given to us laws arising from the very nature and design of Christianity: they have prescribed rules of conduct, which bear on all our concerns in society and in private: they have enjoined a strict examination into these as well as into our own hearts: They have done all this as fully and effectually as it could possibly have been

done. How far this will reach the subject before us will be, in some measure shewn hereafter. At present it need only be said, that he who will discharge no duty, but that which is in so many words named in the Bible, or he who will consider no act reprehensible which is not as distinctly mentioned, is governed by a standard very different from the Word of God. That spirit of obedience which owes its birth to love, is very foreign to the indocile and stubborn temper which reluctantly submits: and which requires the most particular and imperative injunctions.— Where the heart is right, a sincere desire to know our duty, will overcome every obstacle to practical discovery: Where it is not, there will be an effort to judge of, and qualify, even the most plain and urgent injunctions of Holy Writ. Exceptions will be pleaded and taken, to accommodate inclination and prejudice.

After all, it appears at least strongly probable that the amusement now under consideration was not forgotten by the Apostolic writers. In the catalogue of "the works of the flesh," mentioned by two of them, we have the term *revelling*;* and in one of them, the expression, "*such like*," is appended to the implied prohibition. What is the meaning of the word here translated *revelling*, has been a matter of dispute. It is certain that it is frequently used, whatever its other senses may be, to express irreligious dancing. If it mean more, the Apostle approaches rather nearer to tautology in the catalogue from which it is taken, than he has done elsewhere. The phrase, "*such like*," in connexion with the words 'emulation,' 'strife,' 'envyings,'—which may not unfrequently be called to mind

* The word *Comoi*, (Gal. v. 21, and 1 Pet. iv. 3.) is derived from Comus, the imaginary Deity of festivity.

in a Ball-room,—gives a latitude to the prohibition, which may well remind us of modern amusements.

The limits of these remarks will not permit an inquiry into all the effects produced upon the feelings, by the scenes of the Ball-room. But if the secret experience of each heart engaged in them, were read throughout, they would be found not remarkably friendly to a placid contentment of mind, or in every instance to a pure morality of thought.*

* A popular work, after suggesting some cautions in respect to this amusement, which it is by no means designed to condemn, has the following expression: "Many a girl dancing in the gaiety and innocence of her heart, is thought to discover a spirit she little dreams of."—*A Father's Legacy.*

The delicacy with which Dr. Gregory has couched this remark, does not conceal its meaning. Where so much caution is necessary, there must be some reason to apprehend danger.

CHAP. IV.

GENERAL ARGUMENTS.

A conformity to the world inconsistent with the obligations of the Christian—this is admitted by those who have made no profession of religion.—The example of others no argument in favour of these amusements.—The Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches, as well as others, opposed to them.—The tendency of these recreations at least doubtful—furnishes a strong reason against them. The practice gives offence to others—a Scriptural proof of its impropriety. These amusements have been expressly recommended to lower the standard of practical religion. They are inimical to devotional duties and feelings.—They promote a temper of worldliness.—The responsibility of example in relation to them.—They lead to an improper expenditure of time—and of money.—The claims on the Christian.—An important rule in respect to our recreations.

It will be seen, that the question before us assumes a more serious aspect, in proportion as the spirituality of the Christian character is brought to

bear upon it. We now tread on different ground. We look to consequences and responsibilities, which do not enter into the consideration of the man of the world; and which gather their importance from their relation to spiritual concerns. It is here the professor of religion must of necessity stand. The vows he has made,—the covenant obligations into which he has passed—the confessions and resolutions which he has entered up—involve him in new personal and relative duties, essentially distinct from those which belong to him in the mere relation of a citizen to the society in which he lives. In his engagement to God and the Church at large, he has solemnly adopted the Holy Scriptures as his standard of conduct: On these, wherever they are practical, he cannot, with impunity, put any other construction than that of their simple meaning; and he is never at liberty to warp that meaning

in accommodation to either his inclination or convenience. It is plain that the covenant which he has made, is between himself and his God. As such, it is to last with his life. No circumstances can absolve him from it. No changes can modify it. He is sacredly pledged to remain by it forever, even in opposition to the mass of popular opinion and sentiment. On a subject of such infinite magnitude he is bound to examine every thing for himself. Any mistake, which is not occasioned by an involuntary and invincible ignorance is essentially criminal. To view the matter of a Christian profession in any other light, is to trifle with the solemnities of eternity.

Now let the Christian lay aside, for a moment, all conflicting opinions on the pursuits which have formed the subject of the foregoing remarks. Let his attention be fully and candidly di-

rected to the following passages from his adopted standard of conduct.

Be ye not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. No man that warreth, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. They that walk after the flesh, cannot please God because the carnal mind is enmity with God. They that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts. To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth: for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. No man can serve two masters:

for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

These passages, with a great variety of others of similar import, constitute the basis of a profession of religion. The engagement is that of an implicit faith and obedience, to these injunctions and views. The only inquiry which remains, respects their practical meaning and design: What is implied by a non-conformity to the world, or a separation from it? Does it consist in abstinence from those sins only, which are distinguished by the letter of the Decalogue? or from those vices only, which are named in so many words in the New Testament? or from those crimes which the laws of civil society are designed to prevent? Is it true, that the strictest morality, indispensable as it is to a sincerity of profession, makes up the sum

of the precepts and views we have quoted? If it were so, it must be confessed, that the scriptural mode of expression is very far from being happy. But it is obviously not so: numerous examples prove the contrary.—The Young Man in the Gospel, was chargeable with no immorality. The whole impediment to his salvation, or to his admission into the ranks of Messiah's followers, consisted in his unwillingness to relinquish the enjoyments of the world, or to undergo a life of self-denial. The injunctions of Jesus Christ, when he founded his Church, were by no means particularly directed against obvious crimes. These were understood sufficiently, without further comment. And even in the solitary instance in which he lifted the veil from eternity to shew us the sufferings of the lost, he assigns no other reason for the misery of the Rich Man, or the happiness of Lazarus,

than that the one lived for the World, and the other for Heaven. The same principle is observable in his reproofs to the Disciples, on their eager anticipation of a temporal kingdom: And the same in his spiritual applications of the Divine law. Nor are we without men in the present day, whose whole deportment comprises a life of the most rigid morality, and who, notwithstanding, entertain no hope, themselves, of being entitled to a saving interest in the Redeemer: men whose example in society should put to the blush thousands who have made an open profession.

If, then, the passages which we have quoted be not expressly intended to mark a distinction in respect to moral demeanour only, they must possess a deeper meaning. They are predicated on the fact that the unrenewed heart, in its inclinations and pursuits, looks only to the present state, and has no desires for the future: on the

fact that the unrenewed heart is at enmity to God; an enmity which lurks under all its movements, and is the secret agent of all its schemes. This melancholy truth is not to be contested now. It is the plain declaration of Scripture. The habits and maxims of the world are of a character consonant with this fact. Its pleasures are found elsewhere than in God himself: Their tendency is, accordingly, to estrange the feelings still further from him; and to keep out of view the infinite concerns which should engross the soul in its preparation for eternity. The directions of Divine Revelation were designed to effect an opposite end. The economy of redemption, of which they form a part, is contrived to give new desires and appetites to the soul; to remove its hopes from earth; to gather its enjoyments from spiritual pursuits. Here are two systems directly adverse to each other. They are composed of

materials incapable of amalgamation.—It was, therefore, necessary that they should be kept apart from each other: without which the command to "grow in grace," and to become rich in spiritual attainments, would be perfectly nugatory.

It is plain that the admonitions which require the Christian to be "separate" do not enjoin an ascetic retirement, or forbid that intercourse which is demanded by the charities of social life: but it is equally so, that they forbid any thing which could ch[illegible] progress in spirituality, or [illegible] deportment undistinguishable [illegible] of the worldling. This distinct[illegible] not new to the man of the world: He has read enough in the Word of God to see that it is there directed. He naturally, therefore, looks for some difference between the life of the Christian and his own: If he find no other than a mere profession; if he see the

same moral appetites, and the same sources of pleasure, in both—his conclusion must necessarily be unfavorable either to the Christian or to his cause.—He might know enough of the Bible and of the heart to believe that "no man liveth and sinneth not"—he might believe that it is fully possible for even the pious man to be overtaken in the hour of temptation—he might have candour enough to set this to its right account, while he would look for the penitence and humility which follow—but he will not, and he cannot, pass a [redacted] charity where there is a [redacted] spirit of worldliness: or wh[redacted] distinctly sees that a prevailing relish for sensual enjoyments has possession of the heart. These are matters clearly understood even where they are not rendered the subject of converse.

This spiritual distinction is not unknown to those who have professed re-

ligion with a decided disavowal of all this "illiberality." It is hard to look over the Bible without being reminded of it; and there are moments when the mind utters its misgivings in a tone louder than that of its sophistry.

To all this there is indeed an objection which may sometimes prevent the more painful suggestions of conscience. These Divine restrictions, when they are seen to be so foreign from the examples of many professors, and when they are found so much to interfere with the customs of society, are secretly suspected to be rather designed for the age in which they were written than for the present day. No one whose conscience is well informed can long entrench it behind an error of this nature. He will observe how unlikely it is that the primitive Christians were subject to more severe restraints than those of our own day. Men who had abandoned their all—who were hunted down like wild beasts

of the forest—whose lot it was to endure privations of every description—such men would be the last to be deprived of pleasures which were innocent, by the commands of their master. And if indeed this plea were found admissible in relation to the broad maxims of the Saviour and his Apostles, it would be hard to tell where its sweeping influence would end, or which of the sacred precepts it would leave on the page. The uncertainty with which such a supposition would cover the path of our duty, would alter the whole character of our responsibility. We are not, [redacted], in less need of restrictive precepts than were the Christians of earlier time. The contrary is the fact. It is not when Christianity is openly assailed, and its defenders subjected to persecution, that evangelical truth is most in danger. It is when religion is outwardly respected—when no temporal affliction follows a profes-

sion—when thousands make it without counting the cost—and when, accordingly, the distinguishing traits of piety are crowded out by a temper of worldliness. It is then that the hazard of mistake is most imminent, and the line of distinction should be most deeply marked. Let it, however, be observed that the Word of God is as unvariable as himself; it will never be accommodated to the sentiments of any period departing from its holy character. It will enjoin all that spirituality which it now requires until its author winds up the concerns of this earth. Until then, it will be our only guide—its directions the promoter of our growth in grace—and the source of our most rational enjoyments. *Then*, its sacred truths will be the criterion of our salvation or ruin, at the judgment-bar. Neither human wisdom, nor counsel, nor cavilling, will abate one jot of the consequences which follow.

The objection that these views imply a necessary singularity of deportment and life, which divides society, and produces a collision of interests and acts, so far from militating against them, serves to prove their Scriptural character. This singularity constitutes the very distinction referred to in the foregoing remarks: It is the very characteristic we are commanded to exhibit to the world at large. It does not assume the posture of a proud and conscious pre-eminence: it does not say, "stand by, I am holier than thou." It makes no pretensions. It claims no superiority. Its language in the mouth of the Christian is simply this; "I part from many of the customs and maxims of those around me, not to evince a sense of greater worth in myself; not to announce my high attainments—but because I find these customs and maxims unfavourable to my spiritual interests:

because the associations into which they lead me, are unfriendly to opposite habits—habits which it is my desire to cultivate—and which I believe conducive to my happiness. It is a liberty of choice, to which I believe myself entitled, in common with every other member of society, when no rule of decorum is infringed, and no individual injury is inflicted."

If there were no consideration of spiritual advantage in the selection of our associates—if we could come up from the most fascinating of sensual pursuits, and, with a heart reeking with a temper of worldliness, enter on the discharge of devotional duty, the question before us would be somewhat different. But it would give place to another, of a more general but not less important character: Without some visible line of distinction, independent of a mere profession, or an outward deportment of mere morality, the Church of Jesus

Christ would be lost to the sight. It is nothing that Temples erected for the service of God might still exist: it is nothing that the outward form of worship would still be carried on within their walls: the spirit and life of religion would be as completely obscured as they would be under a covering of the grossest superstition.

This is the sentiment of the intelligent worldling himself. Why does public opinion declare against a minister of the Gospel who is known to frequent places of public amusement? Why is it that the more virtuous part of community, who may have never embraced religion, would lose their respect for such a man, so far as his office is concerned? Why would they consider him a less fit comforter than others in the hour of affliction? The palpable fact is, that they discover an obvious inconsistency in his deportment. They suspect a want of that holy unc-

tion which should distinguish the sacred office. He carries about him a savour of worldliness too obvious to be unnoticed; and too plain not to form a contrast with the exercise of his official functions. Now the very idea that a minister of the Gospel is to set an example to his flock implies a corresponding duty on the part of others to follow that example,—unless it be supposed that much in the exemplar is to be mere moral ornament without any practical tendency on others. This, however, is absurd. And it is wholly irreconcilable with the directions of the Apostle, "*Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Christ.*" If then, ministerial example is perfect in proportion to its spirituality, and the private Christian is bound to follow it in all its perfection, the duty on this subject is distinctly marked: and it is, at least by inference, fairly acknowledged.

The argument drawn in favour of fashionable amusements from the circumstance that some who are called good men approve of them, is weak in the extreme. Are we at liberty to follow these good men in *all* that they do? May not even good men be not only in error, but sometimes in serious wrong? We are to follow none excepting *so far as they follow Christ.* How far they do so is our first inquiry: Unless we are willing to stake the eternal interests of the soul on their rectitude; or unless they can stand our security against the consequences of a departure from the Divine precepts. But this is impracticable. Our responsibility is derived from the light of the Gospel, and we shall be judged by our conformity to this, whatever others may say or do. And, in the meanwhile, he certainly betrays no peculiar tenderness of conscience, and no very solicitous thought for the fate of his soul or the

glory of his God, who without a scrupulous examination for himself, hazards all on the infallibility of men subject to the same errors and passions with himself. No man is faultless.—And no one, therefore, can be safely taken as a practical guide in every particular. If the examples of others who are reputedly pious, necessarily sanctioned all their conduct and views, why would it not be proper to form a character from the combined weaknesses and errors of many—and then to consider it at least defensible? Unless the argument will bear us through, it is unsafe to trust it at all.

But it is worth while to examine more closely the private character of those who practically defend these popular amusements. Are not some defects observable in them which might put us on our guard in respect to others? Are the lives and conversation of these persons habitually spiritual? Does a

holy zeal uniformly pervade their intercourse with society? Is their influence expended in behalf of the welfare of Zion? Are they found the active promoters of Christian benevolence, and devotional feeling? We are not deciding these doubts. But if they cannot be affirmatively solved, it is very certain that such persons are not complete exemplars of Christian conduct. And it is still more certain that any views of theirs are not necessarily fit guides for us.

To say, as is often said in common parlance, "I am satisfied to be as good as such a man," is not only an indirect palliation of weakness in him, but it is expressing a satisfaction with a lower standard of religion than that of the Word of God. It is doing more: It is indicating that we are at liberty to form our own views of religion, from our own judgment of propriety, independent of the Bible: that we are

at liberty to graduate a scale of zeal for ourselves, with the only provision that our reward is to be accordingly. If it be said that this consequence does not follow; If it be not necessary to answer the foregoing questions in the affirmative, then let us try another supposition; We will suppose that what is called Christian zeal is not an indispensable quality: that it is a matter of choice, consistently with true piety. Let us, in connexion, remark the admonition of Christ to the Church in Laodicea, "*I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot.*" Now if this accommodation to the notions and practices of the worldling be not so low as lukewarmness, how low would it be necessary to descend in order to be *cold*, according to the scale we have mentioned? The threatenings of the head of the Church would certainly be less likely to reach us on this supposition than they are now; because in

such event, and according to this scale, we are safe while we are not chargeable with flagitious crime.

It is no palliation of any evil to say that not only individuals but whole Churches approve of it. Churches may be, and have been, not only wrong, but wholly corrupt. We acknowledge none of them to be infallible. It is not however true, that any church of Christ, as a whole, really approves of fashionable amusements in the example of its professors of religion. It may contain a greater or less number of nominal Christians—it may retain within its communion a large proportion of worldly members, who mutually encourage each other in laxness of practice and views; and who feel independent of all ecclesiastical counsel or rule:—yet, whatever may be connived at, it is certain that all of *esteemed piety*, within its pale, take a different ground; and it is equally certain that the terms of admission to

membership are inseparable from an engagement to "*renounce the world and the flesh.*" By this is meant,—if it mean any thing,—a renunciation of all that would impede a life of practical godliness, or prevent the exercise of a holy zeal in the cause of evangelical truth. Many of the little details of duty are not expressly enumerated. Yet in some of these churches, fashionable amusements are prohibited nearly in so many words. In others it is thought inexpedient or unnecessary to say any thing on the subject in their articles of government and discipline. In a Pastoral letter of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, the subject before us has been fully noticed.*

"On the fashionable, though, as we believe, dangerous amusements, of *Theatrical Exhibitions* and *Dancing*, we deem it necessary to make a few ob-

* Pastoral Letter of 1818.

servations. The Theatre we have always considered as a school of immorality.—If any person wishes for honest conviction on this subject, let him attend to the character of that mass of matter, which is generally exhibited on the Stage. We believe all will agree, that comedies at least, with a few exceptions, are of such a description, that a virtuous and modest person cannot attend the representation of them, without the most painful and embarrassing sensations. If indeed custom has familiarized the scene, and these painful sensations are no longer felt, it only proves that the person in question has lost some of the best sensibilities of our nature; that the strongest safeguard of virtue has been taken down, and that the moral character has undergone a serious depreciation.

"With respect to *Dancing*, we think it necessary to observe, that however plausible it may appear to some, it is

perhaps not the less dangerous on account of that plausibility. It is not from those things which the world acknowledges to be most wrong, that the greatest danger is to be apprehended to religion, especially as it relates to the young. When the practice is carried to its highest extremes, all admit the consequences to be fatal; and why not then apprehend danger, even from its incipient stages. It is certainly, in all its stages, a fascinating and an infatuating practice. Let it once be introduced, and it is difficult to give it limits. It steals away our precious time, dissipates religious impressions, and hardens the heart. To guard you, beloved brethren, against its wiles and its fascinations, we earnestly recommend that you will consult that sobriety which the sacred pages require. We also trust, that you will attend with the meekness and docility becoming the Christian character, to the admoni-

tions on this subject of those whom you have chosen to watch for your souls. And, now beloved brethren, that you may be guarded from the dangers that we have pointed out, and from all other dangers which beset the path of life and obstruct our common salvation, and that the great head of the church may have you in his holy keeping, is our sincere and affectionate prayer. Amen."

A similar course had been adopted in the Protestant Episcopal Church.— In a Pastoral letter to the members of this Church from the House of Bishops,* we find the following paragraphs.

"We would be far from an endeavour after an abridgment of Christian liberty. But we cannot forget, that in a list of the classes of evil livers, there is introduced the description of persons who are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;" nor, in respect to the

* In 1817, assembled in Trinity Church, New-York.

female professors of religion in particular, the admonition, that "she who liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." We are aware of the difficulty of drawing the line between the use of the world and the abuse of it: that being conceived of by different persons equally pious and virtuous, according to the diversity of natural temperament, and of the states of society in which they have been placed by education or by habit: but we know, that where the conscience can reconcile itself to the drawing as near to the territory of sin, as it can persuade itself to be consistent with the still standing on secure ground, deadness to spiritual good at the best, but more commonly subjection to its opposite, is the result.

"In speaking of subjects of the above description, we would not be understood to class among them any practice which is either immoral in itself, or so customarily accompanied by im-

morality, that the one is necessarily countenanced with the other."

In the Journal of the General Convention, in which the letter just quoted was read, the subsequent Resolution may be found:

"Resolved, that the following be entered on the Journal of this House, and be sent to the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies, to be read therein:—

"The House of Bishops, solicitous for the preservation of the purity of the Church, and the piety of its members, are induced to impress upon the clergy the important duty, with a discreet but earnest zeal, of warning the people of their respective cures, of the danger of an indulgence in those worldly pleasures which may tend to withdraw the affections from spiritual things. And especially on the subject of gaming, of amusements involving cruelty to the brute creation, and of theatrical

representations, to which some peculiar circumstances have called their attention,—they do not hesitate to express their unanimous opinion, that these amusements, as well from their licentious tendency, as from the strong temptations to vice which they afford, ought not to be frequented."

The term "*especially*" in this paragraph, while it directs the notice to certain specified evils—"to which some peculiar circumstances had called the attention"—does not diminish the decided disapprobation expressed in the Resolution against other worldly amusements inconsistent with spiritual things.*

* The reader is likewise referred to a resolution in the Journal of the General Convention, (1817) p. 12, connected with another, p. 15.

Since the preceding page was put to press a friend has furnished the writer with the 54th Number of the Gospel Advocate, an Episcopal work published in Boston, in which appears the first part of an "Essay on the Impropriety and Inconsistency of Communicants engaging in what are called the Amuse-

The views of the Baptist and Methodist churches are well known.

It has been said in the spirit of defence, "that if people were not occupied in such amusements they might be worse employed: and that some who discard them are doing what is no better." Such an expression is often uttered in that petulance of recrimination, which follows a conscious weakness of the cause, and which, to change the nature of the argument, forsakes the *principle* to make an onset on the *person*. It is undoubtedly true that the professor of religion might be worse employed. But we are surely not reduced to the perpetual dilemma of choosing one of two evils:—we are not placed in circumstances which require us to commit one sin to avoid

ments of the Age:—By the Rev. Gregory T. Bedell, A. M. Rector of St. Andrew's Church, Philadelphia." It is sincerely to be hoped that this Essay may be widely circulated.

another. The way of duty is sufficiently plain to preserve us from all necessity of pausing on such a question: it is pointed out by the simple direction—"*avoid all appearance of evil.*" Nor is it any more to the purpose that some who condemn these amusements may be guilty of more serious sins. Yet if attending and defending them would preserve us from such more serious sins, the matter would be given up: or it would at least assume some other shape. In the interim, it is freely admitted that a spirit of worldliness, in another form—a temper of covetousness, and even still more flagrant iniquities,—may be visible in the conduct of some professors of religion: But it is never pretended that the violation of God's law on their part, in one respect, will form our excuse for the same act in another.

What has been said, if it does not settle the question in itself, at least deduces an argument of essential importance

to the conscientious Christian: It is that of the *doubtfulness* of the propriety of these amusements.

If there be a single principle in the word of God, which from its very nature is out of the reach of controversy, it is, that *the doubtful character of an action renders it unlawful.* The following expressions of the Apostle Paul have a close connexion with our subject. "*Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth, is damned,* (condemned,) *if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*"* The particular act to which the inspired writer refers,—that of eating meat offered to Idols,—was not deemed wrong in itself: It could only be considered so by the prejudice of a weak mind. But it became essen-

* Rom xiv. 22, 23.

tially evil when it was committed under a distrust of its propriety. The following paraphrase of the passage just quoted may serve to illustrate the principle. 'Hast thou faith, or a full persuasion of the lawfulness of this act? be satisfied that God is a witness of thy conscientiousness. Happy is that man who has no reason to condemn himself in the act which he allows to be lawful, but is well persuaded that his convictions are founded on the decisions of an enlightened conscience. He that doubteth the propriety of an act, and yet engages in it, is condemned; inasmuch as he is not fully convinced of the rectitude of his conduct; for whatever is done without a full conviction of its lawfulness is sin.' Now let us compare the question before us with this evangelical rule: The large proportion, if not the whole number, of those who sustain the reputation of an exemplary life of piety consider what are called fash-

ionable amusements, inconsistent with a sincere profession of religion. Such has been the sentiment of the earliest Christians as well as of those of the present day. The Gospel requires an obvious distinction between the Christian and the worldling: that distinction must be visible not only in moral demeanour, but in a spirituality of deportment.—These two things, if they tend no further, at least tend to render such amusements doubtful. And when the question is viewed dispassionately, without any previous prejudice, that doubtfulness increases. Here then the matter is settled at once by the Apostolic rule.

That man acts under a very lax standard of morality who considers a transaction excusable because he is not confident it is wrong. There is no tenderness of conscience in such a case: his obedience is that of legal restraint; his regard for the law of God does not arise from his affections, but from his fears.

Such a disposition is not likely to examine the tendency or consequences of an act: very little likely to recognize a law of expediency as a guide to Christian duty: and still less likely to be free from that moral blindness which is incapable of investigating the practical bearing of the Gospel doctrines. Under a disability of this serious nature, it is possible to pass through life without a single distinct idea of the grand principles of evangelical truth. Growth in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, on which the Apostle lays so much stress, is, in the idea of such a one, a mere figure of speech: the higher attainments in grace, which can only be reached by an active and enlightened conscience, mean very little: and all that is consolitary, and all that is refreshing to the heart, which are obtainable through the same medium, are entirely unknown.

No one can be called obedient to the word of God, who rejects the

Apostolic rule, in matters of doubtfulness. And especially, when the infringement of that rule is not only unnecessary, but incurred for the sake of a momentary gratification, or to please others, who have no interest in either their own or our eternal welfare.

The same fact which renders the propriety of fashionable amusements questionable, presents another argument against them: If those whom we esteem pious, are conscientiously principled against such recreations, they are wounded by our engaging in them.—Now to say, that every man ought to leave his neighbour to stand or fall by himself, and accordingly to suffer no feeling to occupy the bosom in relation to his conduct in these things, is to wave the matter on a ground very foreign from the economy of Christianity. No Christian can do this.—It is not the single interest of the private individual he has in view: it is

that of the cause of the Redeemer.—This he has made his own: He feels himself wronged by any injury which it sustains. That same diffusive charity, which sinks in his sight little Sectarian distinctions, and teaches him to love all "who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," renders him susceptible of feeling, whenever the cause of religion is dishonoured. Charity owes its existence to a love of the Redeemer; and is inseparable from a love of his cause, or of those who are supposed to be enlisted in it. To suppose the Christian, then, unaffected by that which he believes detrimental to the influence of true religion, is to suppose an impossibility. We are not without analogy of the same thing in civil communities: Whatever public sentiment has determined to be a matter of reproach, or mischievous to the welfare of society, is proscribed: even although there may be no written law in relation to

it: And he who violates such a tacit regulation, is justly considered an offender against the better feelings of the community. And it is no palliation of his fault, that some others may be loose enough to countenance him in it: This public sentiment is derived from the more virtuous, and not the more loose portion of society.—Now the Church of Jesus Christ, is a community, whose express object is to honour their Head: the views which are entertained by those whose acknowledged piety has given them a prominence in it, are entitled to our respect: no matter what their birth, worldly rank, or power, may be. The feelings or anxieties which are called into play here, are far more intense,—because they relate to concerns of far more importance,—than those of the former case.

An independence of action, and a choice of practical principles, is an ab-

surdity of terms when applied to a Christian profession. The moment this is assumed, the professor becomes amenable to all the laws of *Expediency* and *Charity*. He will find that they bear on many an act which may be right in itself, but which is wholly altered in its character by that bearing. The question of "abstracted rectitude" never can belong to the department of Christian casuistry. This truth involves another which goes far towards disposing of all doubts on the subject before us; if indeed it do not completely settle them.

The law of Charity, it is true, is very distinct from the maxims of the world: and it belongs to no other system of religion than our own. But here it is intended to be the ligament of society. It is designed to be the interpreter of other rules in the great Christian code. It demands self-denial, and it commands sacrifices for the sake

of others, even where we have no other personal interest in the individual than that which arises from itself. "*He that loveth not his brother abideth in death,**" is a distinguishing axiom of the word of God. The Apostle brings it into play in a case completely parallel with the one now under consideration. He shews us that instead of being independent of our brethren in the choice of our conduct, we are bound to act with a reference both to their views and their feeling. Their very ignorance, instead of being a reason for contempt, is an argument in behalf of our duty to keep a special regard to their feelings, while the sacrifice on our part compromits no other duty: "*But if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice unto Idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake. For the earth is the*

* 1 John iii, 14.

*Lord's, and the fulness thereof. Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience. For if I, by grace, be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God."** The following paraphrase will, perhaps, render this passage more intelligible to those who are not accustomed to a critical study of the Scriptures: It will be recollected, by the way, that the question before St. Paul, was a case of conscience, whether the meats which were sold in the markets and had been sacrificed to Idols, might be eaten by the Christians, when in the houses of the Heathen:—'If any one say to you,

* I Cor. x. 28—32.

this is a thing which had been sacrificed to an Idol—thus intimating that in his opinion you join in the worship of the Idol by eating—do not eat it for conscience sake; because the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, there is, therefore, abundance to satisfy the appetite lawfully without this. In speaking of conscience, I do not mean thine own,—for thou art convinced, that the eating of such meats is not encouraging Idol-worship—but the conscience of the other who may consider it differently: If it be answered, why is my liberty judged of, or governed by another man's conscience? and why, if I, by the grace of God, to whom the earth belongs, be allowed to partake of all its fruits, am I evil spoken of for doing that for which I give thanks? It is replied—on that very account—that thou art not restricted to any particular food—and that God is so gracious in his

gifts—whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, ye are bound by his goodness to do all to his glory: therefore, give no offence unto others.' It is in relation to the same thing, the Apostle had said—"*But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ;*"* and with all the disinterestedness of one who was ready to practice the doctrine he taught, added, "*Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.*"— It was the same Apostle, who in a letter to another Church, says, "*It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.*"† The whole of this case was one very remote from being doubt-

* I Cor. viii. 12, 13.

† Rom. xiv. 21.

ful in itself considered; and it was decided—not to be rendered doubtful—but essentially criminal, if it gave offence to a brother. It is not difficult to imagine what the decision of St. Paul would have been in the matter now before us, where one evil is superadded to the other.

A delicate regard to the scruples of others, especially where no important personal advantage is sacrificed, is one of the characteristics of Christian magnanimity. But, where the question is believed by many of sober judgment and enlightened understanding, to be connected with the vital interests of religion, as in the present instance, it becomes more hazardous to tread with an incautious step. A blow may be struck, and a pain inflicted, to gratify a selfish end, which the Head of the Church may not pass lightly by. The Church of Jesus Chrish is emphatically called his "body:" the pious constitute

its members; any evil, therefore, which is inflicted on a part, is recognized by the whole.

It is unnecessary to remain longer in this part of our subject. Let us advance to another: These amusements superinduce a temper and spirit of worldliness, and are therefore inconsistent with a sincere profession of religion. This argument does not refer merely to the effect of blotting out the distinction which the Gospel requires between the Christian and the worldling, and on which much has already been said, but it comes home to the bosom and private experience of the Christian himself. It assumes the truth, that no one can attend on such amusements without a prejudicial result on his devotional feelings: or without a relaxation of that habitual reference to eternal things which makes up the essential character of evangelical Christianity. This tendency is sometimes discoverable to the man of the

world himself, so far as it can be so in external acts, and these pursuits have therefore been earnestly recommended as an effectual means to remove what is called the severity of religious restraint. The following remarks, as an example, are taken from the work of a philosopher whose mind was not a little tinctured with the infidelity of the French school, a fact which will furnish an interpretation of such terms as 'fanaticism' and 'frenzy.' "In little religious sects, the morals of the common people have been almost always remarkably regular and orderly; generally much more so than in the established Church. The morals of those little sects, indeed, have frequently been rather disagreeably rigorous and unsocial." "The second of these remedies, (to correct whatever was *disagreeably rigorous*,) is the frequency and gaiety of public diversions." "Public diversions have always been the objects of

dread and hatred, to all the fanatical promoters of those popular frenzies."* With equal justice it has been said, that "if some of the religious denominations in our country would encourage their members to participate in popular recreations, it would be found a favourable measure to liberalize their sentiments and feelings, as well as to relax the superstitious severity of their views.†— Now the known religious sentiments of these writers will explain how far things are called by their right names, and what is the nature of the evil which they desire to remedy.

There are certainly professors of religion who know little or no difference in the nature of their experience: and who tell us, accordingly, that they discover no alteration in their frame of mind after engaging in such recreations.— It is not easy to reason with such per-

* Smith's Wealth of Nations, Vol. III.
† Willert.

sons from the effect of changes which they have never felt: and still less easy to point out evils which they cannot comprehend. But he who has "passed from death unto life," and who since that change has discovered in himself new inclinations, and has found new sources of happiness, is familiar with a difference in the religious frames of his mind plainly referable to his habits or employments. It is not hard for him to distinguish between acts the mere morality of which he may not be able to investigate, but the propriety or impropriety of which is obvious to him from their effect on himself. It is not saying too much to affirm that no one can return from these amusements and close the day with all that fervency of devotional exercise, with that undivided attention to the perusal of the word of God, and that diligent examination of his own heart, which will be the last daily exercise of the growing Chris-

tian. The scene in which he had engaged possessed a power of attraction which is not relinquished when the engagement is closed. It is over and over enacted, at least in many of its parts, by the effective exercise of fancy. The reflected picture is vivid, and perhaps long vivid, to the mind's eye, even when the reality is passed. This attraction was not derived from the power of a religious taste, but from inclinations which were wholly of a worldly nature: These, of course, are fed and cherished, and strengthened: And so far as they are so, they effectually militate against an opposite and holy temper.

Now every one who is conversant with any thing of religious experience, well knows that a devotional and happy frame of mind is more easily lost than regained. It is, therefore, not a momentary effect which is produced in the present instance. The coldness

and insensibility which now attend the performance of religious duties, will either be followed by the pains of remorse, or they will increase in intensity by continuance. One link in the chain of evil, is succeeded by another. The feelings and character undergo a new modification. The comfort of religion is forgotten, or only remembered in its vacancy, as a thing that is passed. Conscience loses its tenderness. Devotion itself is a matter of form and constraint. The spirit and beauty of holiness are visible no more. Such has been the fearful history of many a Christian, whose first backsliding step was taken in "innocent amusements."

This statement is equally illustrated in the example of the serious inquirer for salvation. No one, who would even defend these popular recreations, will deny that they have a tendency to banish the anxiety of an awakened

mind, and divert the thoughts from the object of inquiry. They have not unfrequently been suggested and adopted as an expedient for this very purpose. If such be the fact, can they be propitious to the spiritual interests of the Christian? Are not the same vigilance and care required to maintain a seriousness of thought in both cases?—Every one whose mind has been directed to religious pursuits is acquainted with the difficulty of keeping the attention fixed, the passions controuled, and the feelings regular. The ordinary intercourse and business of life present powerful temptations of themselves. Every Christian has reason to complain of his trials from these sources: and to mourn over the effects which they produce. To live in the world, and to engage in its concerns without largely imbibing its spirit, is no easy matter for any one. To pursue our daily avocations without an undue in-

tensity of application to them, requires a degree of practical wisdom which can never be obtained without being familiar with our closets, and the frequent examination of our hearts. But the trials which arise from these sources are not only unavoidable but necessary. They constitute part of the means of growth in grace. They strengthen the religious affections. They afford an opportunity of extending the influence of a holy example. Such temptations are not therefore to be deprecated. The prayer of the Christian, like that of his Master for him, should be, not to be taken out of the world, but to be delivered from the evil of it.

Very different is the effect of unnecessary temptations. They were never designed for him: and no blessing may, therefore, be expected from them. No one can enter into them without criminal rashness. The plain line of duty calls for all our strength. We ha

none to spare to meet the enemy on his own ground, where we were never called, and where the odds are fearfully against us. It is a truth worthy of the notice of every Christian, that he who falls in the path of his duty, from an assault for which he was unprepared, may recover with comparative ease; But he who rushes into avoidable temptation will assuredly find an issue of a very different character. It is a complicated evil. It indicates an unhallowed daring. It proves a temper of proud self-dependence. It displays a criminal trifling with God himself, inasmuch as it succeeds that very petition which is supposed habitually to arise from his heart, and which should form a prominent part of all our prayers—"*lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*" No divine assistance may be expected where the practice and the prayer contradict each other. The kingdom of grace in

the heart has been emphatically called "a kingdom of means." Every desire that is offered for advancement in holiness is to be connected with a corresponding series of efforts on our own part. The Spirit of God acts in conjunction with these : a connexion which is never broken where the great end of sanctification is effected. To leave all, then, to be done by the Creator, without any exertion of our own, is folly. But to act in opposition to the very end professedly desired is worse than folly.

We may venture to affirm that no one who habitually attends either of these diversions will have felt disposed to retire previously, to ask the blessing of his Redeemer upon it. There is something so incongruous in the two occupations, that very few would think of bringing them near together. If the devotional exercise be fitly performed, the disposition to enter the

scene of amusement will be lost. If the exercise be not thus performed, it is plain that the temper of mind which prevented a fitness is not likely to be improved by the contemplated engagement. A distinction between the ordinary duties of life and mere popular recreation is obviously made in the case before us. On the one, the professor of religion is supposed to have entered with prayer: The other is practically believed to be inconsistent with prayer. Under what class of acts then, would it be regarded by him who desires to obey the sacred direction, "*Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;*" and who, accordingly, recognizes the duty of rendering every engagement, in a greater or less degree, subservient to the interests of religion? In other words, what shall be thought of an employment, which from its very nature is to remain unhallowed by the absence of the blessing of God? To

say—as some have said—that we may obtain a greater relish for religion by the disgust which such pursuits create in the serious mind, is in other words to condemn the pursuits. But is this method of producing a salutary effect by unhallowed means, a safe one? Is it ever recommended in the Word of God? Is it not tampering with the natural corruptions? And can it ever be so effectual to our good as a uniform life of holiness?

One of the primary duties of every head of a family is that which occupies the Domestic Altar. It is in the faithful discharge of this duty that we look for family blessings, or hope to secure the divine protection to the household under our care. But is a regular attention to this, consistent with the irregular hours, and the trifling thoughts occasioned by these amusements? Is not the altar sometimes neglected from this cause, and the family suffered to retire

to rest without invoking the aid of its Great Head? Is there not a want of confidence, or at least an indisposition to address Him whom we profess to consider the guardian of our sleeping hours? These questions deserve a serious answer. They involve consequences of magnitude.

An attachment to fashionable amusements, as has already been hinted, argues an irreligious taste. This is perfectly plain from the characters of the great mass who frequent them. The sensual and careless, who have no idea of a strict conformity to the spirituality of the Gospel, and who feel that they are properly in their own element while thus employed, compose the principal society on such occasions. This is natural. A disinclination to religion must be connected with a perpetual effort to banish all serious thoughts respecting our eternal welfare. An admirable wri-

ter, whose words we quote on the subject, has said:

"This is the source of all the tumultuous occupations of men, and of all that is called diversion, or pastime; in which their only aim in effect, is, to make the time pass away without feeling it, or rather without feeling themselves; and, by wasting this small portion of life, to avoid that bitterness and inward disgust, which would necessarily accompany an attention to ourselves for that period. The soul finds nothing in herself that contents her. She sees nothing but what it distresses her to think of. And this obliges her to look round about her, to seek how she may lose the recollection of her real condition, by applying herself to external objects. Her pleasure consists in this forgetfulness: and nothing is wanting to make her miserable, but obliging her to see herself, and to live with herself."*

* Pensées de M. Pascal.

The Christian, on the contrary, not only stands in no need of such auxiliaries to his happiness, but possesses inclinations and taste directly at variance with them. It is not his interest to forget himself, but to encourage an habitual inquiry into his moral condition, and the spiritual state of his heart. It is this which constitutes the great business of his life. And any thing in opposition to it is equally in opposition to the peace of his mind. It was said by a Roman philosopher, that a man's character may be known by his amusements, because in these he is less a hypocrite than in any thing else? This remark might be applied to the Christian with much more justice.

The evil effects produced on the mind, by scenes of gay amusement will not, it is true, be the same in all; much will depend on the depth of the impression made, or the intensity of feeling, with which the pleasure is

pursued. The sober and sedate temper may suffer comparatively little. The traces of the past were faint; there was neither ardour nor excitation. On the other hand, the degree of enjoyment is necessarily low. The interest taken in the occupation is small. The attendant may go and return with almost equal unconcern. But there are others of a very different turn of mind; on whom there is a more positive and lasting effect.—It is to such, these scenes are most attractive: and it is to such, for the same reason, they are most injurious. The ardent and sanguine disposition which engages earnestly in every thing it ever undertakes, encounters a proportionate danger from every worldly occupation. But that danger is increased by the fascinating influence of the present engagement. There are others whose buoyant spirits are intoxicated by such scenes, and who feel

their exhilarating influence long after they are past. Here the result on a character naturally volatile, and requiring all the restraint which the sobrieties of religion can give, is ever hazardous. That restlesness of mind,—that flurry of feeling and temper,—that eager but irregular commotion of thought and action,—all of which are so unfriendly to the chastening influence of piety, are promoted and encouraged by the gaieties of popular amusement. These in their turn whet the appetite they have created or revived. They reciprocally encourage each other. The young Christian, whose natural cast of character approaches to this, has reason to watch the effect of all his pursuits with peculiar care—and to guard against asssociation and engagements which are adapted to volatilize the spirits, or feed a natural vanity.

The plea of exemption which is offered by many who are ready to say,

"these things never did *me* any harm," is not very easily sustained. But if it were freely admitted, and if in the admission all the arguments previously mentioned were given up, or—what is more likely to follow—forgotten—the objector has gained very little. The established truth that others may be injured by such recreations, is a reason, if there were no other, why he should abstain from them.

Few scripture maxims are so little considered, but none are more completely established than this—that the wrong committed by others, in consequence of our example, may be, in a greater or less degree, chargeable to ourselves. This maxim composes a principal point of St. Paul's argument on the question relative to the meat of Sacrifices, to which we have already adverted. The amount of his reasoning—or rather the amount of the Word of God on the subject is this: that

he who leads another to commit sin by any act of his own, even although that act might have been otherwise innocent in itself, is involved in the guilt he has occasioned. Such is the complicated character of our responsibility. It is not one or two that are dependent on the conduct of the professor of religion in the shaping of their deportment, or in the adoption of their opinions. It is not to the little circle of his own immediate intimates or connexions that the evil of a suspicious example is confined. Nor is it within the more extended sphere of general acquaintance that such evil is limited: It extends from the individuals of one to those of another circle: It ramifies far and wide; until the first source from which the mischief begun is lost to the sight. The evil of example does more: it survives the Exemplar: it lives, and acts with all its pestiferous influence when the exemplar is forgot-

ten: And there is powerful energy in posthumous wickedness.

But the mischief of unhappy example in the professor of religion does not consist in this alone. He cannot charge himself with a precise measure of evil: He cannot say, 'I have done thus much wrong and no more:' The man who follows him, and who is satisfied in doing wrong under the shelter of an example, is the last to be confined to that degree of evil. He will go beyond it: 'This much is excusable, a little more is nearly as much so.' His own imitator has equal liberty, and proceeds with equal step.

There is no subject of reflection which should more readily create a salutary alarm than this: there is none which presents a more serious admonition. Acts whose influence and consequences are confined to ourselves have their limits of evil, and carry their final issue no further than to our own

destiny: But acts which are to effect others are of a nature infinitely more important. Their beginning alone is visible: Their end is beyond our sight: Their progress is active and continued, gathering guilt as they proceed, and multiplying consequences remote and near. Such may be the history of a single deed whose first appearance may be negative—or perhaps even innocent—if confined to the first perpetrator.

If, as has been already said, thousands who would otherwise be doubtful in respect to the consistency of these amusements lose their apprehensions under the example of Christians,—or of those who profess to be such—if thousands who suffer in their spiritual interests by such pursuits, are still led into them by the example of others, what a weight of responsibility is assumed by that example! 'Others engage in these things and why may not I?'—is a question usually followed by

the act itself, without waiting to inquire into the consequences likely to ensue in the different cases. Nor is this all. Not only may the serious inquirer into religion find a stumbling-block in this example; not only may the thoughtless and giddy be confirmed in habits unfriendly to serious reflection: not only may a natural levity be revived and cherished in many who follow us; not only may all this be effected, but it is effected with no proportionate gain to ourselves. The sacrifice required in order to have prevented all this evil, was trifling; too trifling to deserve consideration, even if the pleasure had been perfectly innocent in itself.

This view of the subject attaches new importance to it. It precludes all selfish excuses. It suffers no one to proceed according to his own inclinations under the plea that his example is of small importance. But even if our influence, and

accordingly our example, were confined within narrow limits; if very few were to be injured or benefitted by our conduct, we are still required to exert all that little influence in favour of evangelical truth. The man who has but little power to do good or evil is very likely to shew by the exercise of that what he would do with greater opportunities. His attachment or his indifference to the interests of religion will still be evinced. And he well knows that he will be required to give an account of his stewardship, whether a single talent or ten, have been committed to his care.

But the professor of religion, in the case before us, is never without a considerable weight of influence. If he dishonour his profession, the matter does not end in an impeachment of his principles; his conduct reflects dishonour on the cause of the Redeemer. But even then, the mischief he commits in

some particulars does not deprive him of the power to do harm in others. He is still pointed out as an example of the compatibleness of worldly engagements with religious vows: In this instance at least, the other inconsistencies of his conduct are forgotten: or they may be defended to give value to the present defence. On the other hand, if his deportment be strictly moral, that alone will render his example imposing. No position can be assumed with more safety than that the professor of religion has taken a place in society, which is public and prominent. No matter what his station may be in the social relations of life, he necessarily carries with him a degree of influence which no reflecting mind can contemplate without anxiety for its result; and with which no conscientious man will carelessly trifle.

The Time which is expended in these amusements is misapplied. If they were not wron in the mselves, or if it could

be shewn that they may be classed with matters of negative influence, the preceding position is still true. To the man of the world, an argument of this character would indeed be of small importance: for the very design of popular recreations is to make us insensible to the lapse of time, or in other words, to prevent its hanging heavy on our hands. But it is well known that he whose hours are regularly and methodically engrossed by duties, has little reason to complain of the burden. And to the Christian it is equally well known that every day is of importance to secure the essential objects for which he was sent into the world—the sanctification of his own soul, and the advancement of his Redeemer's cause: and we are never without the opportunity of promoting one of these ends. If attention to these things would comprise a life of dulness, it would be unjust to denominate the life of the Christian

happy; for they are the end of his being, and his happiness ought to depend on the assiduity which he exercises to secure that end.

To say that we were sent into the world merely to enjoy ourselves in its pleasures, is to utter the language of the grossest sensuality. An ordinary reader of the Bible would see that man—the heir of eternity—can have no time to lose. The impenitent sinner who, strictly speaking, lives under a respite only, is under obligations to his own everlasting interest to waste none of those moments which should be expended in making his peace with his God. The Christian, whose engagement it is to be distinct from the world, and to whom the present age furnishes new and continual means of doing and devising good, will never have reason to complain of the superfluity of time. He recognizes the direction of the Apostle. "*That he no*

longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." "*Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*"

The hours which are expended by the votary of pleasure, in that species of "busy idleness"—to use a term adopted on the supposition that no positive evil is effected—are not to be counted in the period spent in the act. We are to take into consideration the time of preparation—in some instances, no small portion of the whole;—that which is lost on the occasion itself; and that which is engrossed on the return. The calculation will vary in the different persons to whom it is applied. But it will be found on the whole materially correct. To the Christian, this expenditure is far more serious. We have then to add, that indefinite term of coldness in religious duty—or of painful effort to restore suspended feelings of devotion, which invariably follows.

To the disinterested observer, no spectacle would seem more incongruous than that of the Christian, who professes to believe that all his hours are called into requisition for the great end of his being, spending them with a prodigality which indicates the weariness they occasion: devising new means to hasten their escape; and to bring himself so much nearer to his final account, with less preparation to meet it, and with longer arrears of unimproved privilege against him: but above all,—seriously defending the propriety of such engagements, under the plea that the mind requires them, and that time was loaned in part for such an end.

The Money which is expended in these amusements, is criminally misapplied. To say nothing of the fact that the large proportion of those who engage in them, have, after discharging what is due to others, very little

that can be spared from the ordinary comforts of life:—to say nothing of the truth that this little might be much better bestowed: to say nothing of the powerful temptation which is occasioned by popular recreations, to lay out what belongs by debt to others;—to say nothing of the many other considerations which apply to the ordinary member of society,—the acknowledged claims on the Christian demand his earnest attention.

The idea that we have a right to disburse our property in such manner as we please—that our Creator requires of us simply a life of private devotion—and that his injunctions do not reach into other matters—can hardly be entertained by any one who has considered the relation in which he stands to his God. It is the motto of the Christian that "*he is not his own.*" His property, as well as his time and talents, is designed to be subservient

to the cause of his God. He admits that practical direction—"*None of us liveth to himself*"—"*whether we live, or die, we are the Lord's.*"

Of all matters entrusted to our stewardship nothing seems so reluctantly acknowledged to be a loan as the property which has fallen to us by right of inheritance, or which has been amassed by industry and care. Yet the Christian well knows that even this is committed only in trust. And that he will have to render a solemn account for all that is entrusted. Now the evil of an injudicious, or rather criminal, disposal of our pecuniary means does not consist merely in the single act,—various as are the ways in which the expenditure is occasioned—but likewise in the consequences which follow. There is a spirit of selfishness acquired which extends more or less through the whole of the life. This statement is illustrated by daily observation.—

Excepting in the few instances in which a natural and undiscriminating generosity exists, men who have contracted a habit of devotedness to worldly pleasure are parsimonious to the claims of Zion. Money appears lost in this return of it to its rightful owner. They count the units presented to the treasury of Christ, while the hundreds which are flung to the God of this world are unreckoned and forgotten.—Those who have been active in promoting the benevolent exertions of the present day will recall frequent instances of this truth.

If the money expended in these amusements promote no good end, it will be, to say the least, sinfully squandered in idleness and folly. But if what has been said in the preceding pages be completely defensible, such a distribution of the smallest portion of our property is treason to the interests of Zion. This is a solemn consideration

to the professor of religion. He has before him, not only the admonitory truth that all he possesses will be reckoned at the audit of Jehovah—that he is required most expressly to promote the cause of the Redeemer by it—but that an expenditure in engagements inimical to his own and others spiritual welfare, is a treacherous perversion of the means of honouring his God.

In concluding this chapter,—the three questions of Bernard, on points of duty, well deserve the attention of the Christian on the present subject. 1. Is it lawful? May I do it and not sin? 2. Is it becoming me as a Christian? May I do it and not wrong my profession? 3. Is it expedient? May I do it, and not offend a weak brother?

And in addition to this, the following quotation from a learned and pious writer is submitted:

"Recreations are lawful and useful if thus qualified: 1st. If the mat-

ter of them be not forbidden; for there is no sporting with sin. 2d. If we have an holy Christian end in them; that is to fit our bodies and minds for the service of God; and do not do it principally to please the flesh. If, without dissembling our hearts, we can say I would not meddle with this recreation, if I thought I could have my body and mind as well strengthened and fitted for God's service without it.— 3d. If we use not recreations without need, as to the said end; nor continue them longer than they are useful to that end; and so do not cast away any of our precious time on them in vain. 4th. If they be not uncivil, excessively costly, cruel, or accompanied with the like unlawful accidents. 5th. If they contain not more probable incentives to vice than to virtue: as to covetousness, lust, passion, profaneness, &c. 6th. If they are not like to be more hurtful to the souls of others

that join with us than profitable to us. 7th. If they be not like to do more hurt by offending any that are weak or dislike them than good to us that use them. 8th. If they be used seasonably, in a time that they hinder not greater duties. 9th. If we do it not in company unfit for us to join with. 10th. Especially if we make a right choice of recreations, and when divers are before us, we take the best; that which is least offensive, least expensive of time and cost, and which best furthereth the health of our bodies, with the smallest inconvenience.

"These rules being observed, recreations are as lawful as sleep, or food, or physic."*

* Baxter's Practical Works, Vol. III. p. 378.

CHAP. V.

CONCLUSION.

It has been seen that many of the arguments on this question, are of a character foreign from the reasoning of the man of the world. The spiritual experience of the Christian, is a matter of which he is of necessity an incompent judge. He sees but little to gain or lose in effects which he does not understand. And yet it is to be lamented, that persons of this description, are too frequently the ready advisers, and the voluntary self-constituted counsellors of those who have the

deepest interest in the question, in determining a point of duty. The sincere professor of religion, should be biassed by no authority of opinion, or by no general reasoning, which clashes with the views of experimental piety, or the simple directions of Scripture. He should examine for himself: and he should suspect his own judgment, when it does not agree with that of others, who sustain the reputation of exemplary piety.

Nor is this the only conclusion which it is humbly desired the reader may draw from the preceding remarks: there is another of equal value: It is that in a question of this nature, his decision should not depend upon the combined sufficiency of the whole sum of argument which has been presented to his consideration. If there be but a single strong reason against these popular amusements, it deserves the most serious thought. One argu-

ment against any act renders it inconsistent with the duty of the Christian, unless an equal force of reasoning appear in its favour. Here, then, the whole matter might be set at rest. No moral good can be derived from these popular recreations: All that is said in their behalf, is of a different nature, or is wholly on the defensive. On the other hand, their influence on the religious interests of the Christian, is certainly unhappy. In the meanwhile, it is admitted that the sacrifice he would make in relinquishing them, while his inclinations are at variance with worldliness, must be trifling in the extreme.

But it is left to the candour of the Christian reader whether the whole of the preceding reasoning, so far as religion is concerned, is not founded in truth? If it be so, his own duty on the subject is perfectly plain. We advance a step further; according to a scriptural

principle already cited, if the mind of the reader were still unsettled—if a struggle or a wavering arrest a decision—this very state of mind passes a condemnatory sentence on the practice in question.

The writer has omitted any reference to *Parental duty* as a branch of his subject, because he is persuaded that the hints which have been given on worldly engagements in general will have furnished a train of thought to the pious parent which anticipates further remark. The sincere Christian will hardly consider scenes of amusement which should not be encouraged by his example, suitable for the society of his offspring. He will have been too well conversant with the human heart to desire that his children should become acquainted with the world—the common plea for introducing them into the circles of fashionable festivity—by mingling at once with its evils.—

He knows that a natural depravity, inherent in every bosom, is not likely to acquire a distaste for frivolity by familiarity with its scenes: nor to obtain a relish for religion by an habitual intercourse with its opposite.

That combined effort which is made by the world against the principles of evangelical truth, and the power of vital godliness, is no where more observable than in the manner in which the hours unoccupied by necessary business are expended. Here a systematic exertion is made to banish a salutary seriousness of mind, and to keep off from a conscious approach to the realities of eternity. Hence there is a *tacit* admission that these very amusements distinguish the acknowledged worldling from the more serious Christian. It is no diminution of the fact, or of its consequences, that this admission is a tacit one. True religion is never attacked with a fearless openness. It is either assail-

ed under a false name, or it is secretly impugned. In the case before us, the effort is to merge all distinction in a spirit of worldliness, and to prevent the discovery of any difference between the citizens of two opposite kingdoms. Hence the pains to defend the consistency of popular recreations: hence the sensitiveness of many whenever that consistency is questioned: hence the anxious desire that professors of religion should not refuse their countenance and support to engagements which are now only silently admitted to make up much of the distinction, but which would then become a palpable line of difference.

These truths deserve the most serious consideration of the true Christian.—He should remember that the mischief effected by a coincidence with the world is not that which is the result of premeditated evil. The false professor does not *intend* to lend the weight of his influence against the common cause of

piety. His agency is carried on insensibly to himself. He may be satisfied that he is not indeed prominent in usefulness, but he will not willingly believe that he is doing harm. He may not aspire to a career of usefulness, and therefore care but little if his character do not stand high as a Christian; but he will not be aware that his influence is far from being negative, and that it is contributed to the side of Mammon. It is this characteristic blindness to our real situation, generally attendant on a hypocritical or formal profession, which should make the following question a material point in the course of our self-examination—'on what side is the weight of our influence bestowed?' A frequent and conscientious inquiry of this nature would be an effectual means of making us acquainted with many of the secret particulars of our own hearts.

Such an inquiry especially becomes us in the present important æra of the

Church. If in the day of the Apostle Peter, an argument was drawn from the fleeting nature of the world, and the approaching advent of Messiah in his glory—if at that remote period it was of force to say—"*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?* the present aspect of the Church at large claims our most earnest attention: It calls for exertion, zeal, and care in proportion to its present interest. It demands an increased vigilance; it requires a greater activity on the part of its members.

No one who is conversant with the prophetic part of his Bible, and has taken an ordinary interest in observing the political and religious state of the world, can look with indifference, or without lively concern, on the appearances presented. He will see a state of things which imposes upon him

new duties,—lays him under new obligations,—and calls into active contribution his talents, influence, time, and property. Now, even if the condition of Zion at large has not in times past called for enterprize from her members—if they were at liberty to rest supinely, or to attend only to private duties, for want of opportunity of extensive usefulness—the Christian of the present day is furnished with no such excuse. He has before him a field for active employment. He is furnished with ample opportunities of engaging in duties, which are adapted to his taste, and suited to the happiest exercise of his thoughts. Under such circumstances, it must be worse than idleness to neglect the cultivation of the heart, the mind, and the means of a Christian philanthropy, for pursuits which distinguish and suit the inclinations of the worldling.

Here are objections taken from the state of the Church of Christ, and our own corresponding obligations. They may indeed, appear of very little or no value to many who have professedly embraced religion. But the reason will be, that the worldly professor of religion, has neither knowledge nor interest in matters of this important character. And it would not be surprising if he were as unfavourable to the operations of Christian benevolence and enterprize, as he would be jealous of an encroachment on his pastimes and pleasures. Here, then, he could see no argument: nothing relevant to his own duty.

The reader to whom these pages are addressed, is supposed to be in very different circumstances. He is supposed to realize the importance of every obligation, which changes of time and events may devolve upon him. He is supposed to approach the question which

is now to be left in his own hands, with less of a desire to defend any pre-conceived prejudice or favourite practice, than to learn the whole truth as it is; with less disposition to cavil, than to open the mind and heart to conviction.

THE END.

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